

THE
GARDEN AT MONK HOLME.

A Novel.

BY
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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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THE GARDEN AT MONK HOLME.

PART III.—*Continued.*

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE MOUNTAINS.

IN the early spring Violet went to Scotland. Mr. Donaldson lived in a lonely and beautiful spot among the mountains. Violet had never been there before, nor had she ever seen Miss Donaldson till she was met by her in her own house. That lady was a stiff and angular old maid, with rather harsh manners and a very kind heart. She spoke with a strong accent, and did not speak very much ; she had led a quiet and narrow life, had had little experience of human nature, and no experience at all of fashionable society. Violet's lot seemed cast for the present among people whose ways were not

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her own, and to whom her pleasant graceful manners were a badge of frivolous disposition and habits. She would have liked the people herself, if they had allowed her, for her sincerity and earnestness were stronger than her accidental love of elegance and beauty ; she was much more conscious of the great ties of human sympathy than the differences in manner and mode of life which separated her from them. Her own mother and Redfern's had persisted in mistaking her refinement for luxuriousness, and Redfern himself had a sense of incongruity in making a young lady so suited for social life into his own wife.

Miss Donaldson, however, did not mis-judge Violet ; she thought her a bonny lass, and liked her pretty ways. Her own manners were stiff and prim ; but she admired Violet's all the more for that, and, like her brother, could see the simplicity and tenderness of Violet's nature shining through her eyes ; so she did not mistake her ease for condescension, or her polish for affectation. For all that, Miss Donaldson was not the sort of woman Violet could make into an intimate friend ; she understood too little of the ways of the world to have any counsel to give, and she

could not have comprehended at all the small difficulties of Violet's position.

So, though Violet was with faithful friends whom she liked and respected, she was still as absolutely alone, as regards confidential intercourse and personal talk, as she had been since her grandfather's death. She could have wished sometimes that Alfred had been her own brother instead of a cousin, for she had no tenderness left to her that was not a little linked with anxiety.

Violet did not see a great deal of the people she stayed with ; they had their own usual occupations, and left her to follow hers. She took her maid with her, and had rooms of her own, where she could remain as much as she liked : altogether she was treated like a person of importance, an heiress with rights of her own.

Redfern went over to see her. He did not arrive there in a very happy state of mind ; his mother had taken an anxious tone of late, and was always suggesting that he had better look after Violet, or she and her fortune might slip through his fingers.

“ I wish her fortune could, somehow,” he

answered crossly ; “ I hear about it on every side, as if I were marrying her money and not herself. I hate her money.”

He felt a little remorseful even in wishing so, because he had nothing to give her in return for what he would like her to lose.

Violet received him with such bright happiness, however, that he thawed into enjoyment himself ; they went a long and delightful walk, and came back with no thought in their minds but the delicious one that very soon they would be really married and always together. Violet was happy enough to tease him as she had not done since Mr. Hilborough died, and he was too happy to think of anything but the satisfaction of her presence.

“ You do wear such ridiculously ugly gloves,” said Violet, pretending to scold him as they stood together in the hall after coming in.

“ You shall choose all the gloves I wear after two months have gone,” said Redfern, looking at her with smiling eyes.

“ What a trouble ! you are not worth it,” she retorted.

“ You are a deceitful young person,” he answered, keeping his hands on her shoulders, and looking into her face ; “ you know you think I am worth any amount of trouble.”

“ Then I am very silly.”

“ I quite agree with you ; but don’t stop being so just at this minute, if you can help it.”

“ When may I stop ?”

“ I don’t know. When I am gone back, if you like,” he said, letting his hands fall, and, with a sudden change in his face, “ then you can write and not speak it ; at any rate, not now, when I am here.”

“ Redfern, what do you mean ?” she asked anxiously, putting a hand on his appealingly as he turned away.

“ Only this,” he answered, clasping both his hands over hers, and turning to look at her sadly, “ I love you so very much, dear, that I sometimes wish with all my heart you would never marry me.”

“ You don’t love me enough,” she replied, in a low tone of vehemence, “ or you never would wish such a cruel thing.”

“ Perhaps not ; I don’t know. I only know

that I am going through a few things I hate for the love of you. Mr. Donaldson is waiting for me in that room at this moment to talk about what had better be done with money I don't want to have."

"Money has nothing to do with it," said Violet impatiently.

"Not to you. You have not my crooked mind, and I have not your patience and kindness. It is a pity you did not bestow such good things on some one who could appreciate them better."

"Nobody ever said such cruel things to me as you do," said Violet passionately, taking her hand away and turning from him.

"I know it's true," he answered with bitterness, "it is my way of loving ; I told you so at the beginning."

He marched away gloomily to the library, and Violet went slowly upstairs without looking round ; her heart was very sore ; she longed so much to go back and speak, or hear some kinder word before she went to her own room. She knew she had sent him to have an interview he disliked with

nothing but weariness and bitterness in his mind ; but she had to go on, and after a hard struggle in her own mind, as she stepped with bent head up the last stairs, she comforted herself with the old thought, “ We do love each other, and so I need not mind.”

Redfern had a long talk with Mr. Donaldson ; he went to the drawing-room afterwards, looking tired and depressed. Violet just smiled at him as he sat down by her silently, and then she went on with her needle-work. Miss Donaldson was in the room working also ; silence was the common entertainment in that household, and it was not considered remarkable that nobody spoke.

Redfern sat watching Violet till his face cleared a little ; he put out his hand to examine her needle-work, about which he really cared nothing, and then she looked up and smiled again, more happily than before.

“ I am afraid I was rude to you just now,” he said, in a low voice.

“ It does not matter,” she answered, with flushing cheeks, “ you have a right to be rude to me if you like.”

He uttered an impatient exclamation, got

up, and walked away. Violet's humility irritated him sometimes ; it left him no choice but to be disgusted with himself. He made no more attempts at an explanation ; he talked instead to Mr. Donaldson when that gentleman came in ; but when Violet looked at him stealthily, she saw that expression of dissatisfaction on his face that she knew so well. She sat quietly working, feeling secretly miserable, but showing no outward signs of it.

Her eyes met his timidly when they said good-night ; she did not want to vex him by any appeal—she knew she had only to wait and he would appeal to her.

“Good-night,” he said, his eyes just meeting hers for a second, without any lingering glance ; his voice was as depressed as his look. He touched her hand loosely, and let it go ; so she went upstairs without another word.

In the morning, when he came downstairs, she saw that he was still absorbed in unpleasant ideas that he could not get rid of ; he was struggling secretly against an inclination to feel unjustly towards others as well as himself. His eye could not meet hers

frankly, because of the consciousness of estranging thoughts ; he was very attentive and polite, but he talked with an effort.

In the course of the morning all the family went out together ; they took a wild and beautiful road through a mountain pass. Mr. and Miss Donaldson went on in front after a short time, and Violet was left walking with Redfern beside her. He did not attempt to talk, and when she glanced at him, she saw that he had a worried and disgusted look, as if he felt bound down by chains that galled him, and was endeavouring not to break out against them.

She did not know what to do ; she could not bear to feel herself so separated in heart from him, yet she was afraid of vexing him by any speech. She waited for a minute, then she put her hand within his arm without a word, and went on silently.

“ You had better not,” he said drily, with a quick glance at her ; “ I’m in a dangerous temper this morning.”

“ I don’t care,” she replied, her eyes meeting his without dismay ; “ I like you in any temper.”

“I wonder if you always will,” he answered abruptly.

She knew that he was softened already, though he was not willing to own it to himself or to her, and she went on with the glow of happiness stealing through her that she always felt when Redfern’s love for her overcame his impatient temper.

“Was the talk about money very disagreeable?” she asked gently, after a little.

“Rather—I don’t know,” he replied absently; “I wonder,” he added grimly, “if the footman is to wait on me as well as you, and if I am expected to drive about in your carriage. It wants re-painting, Mr. Donaldson says. Don’t you think I want repainting too, to match?”

“You might do with a new coat,” Violet replied wickedly, smiling with a side glance at him.

“I am afraid I am too rusty altogether to suit your fine establishment. Had you not better advertise for some one more fit to belong to it? ‘Wanted, a handsome husband, with elegant manners, to match other goods.’”

“If you like,” she said demurely.

“No, that’s as you like,” he answered, rather impatiently; “you are quite free to please yourself. Don’t be afraid that I shall interfere.”

Violet was wounded again; she went on without answering, and with difficulty resisted the impulse to withdraw her hand. Redfern knew he was trying her patience, and that knowledge tried his own still more, so he said nothing else, and when they reached the top of the pass, where the others were waiting for them, Violet quietly drew back and left him alone.

There was a little inn by the wayside there; both ways there was a view down the steep descent into a valley below; there was the glimpse of a cold gray lake far down in the distance, and the brown mountain sides rose before and behind, the sheep and the loose stones looking like tiny gray specks upon them.

In front of the inn a carriage was standing, a lady and two children were sitting in it; the gentleman of the party had gone into the inn, the driver had dismounted, and was getting food for the horses.

Redfern went forward to speak to Mr. and Miss Donaldson ; Violet saw him address them in the patient, absent manner he used to strangers when he was most vexed. She herself went back, as if to look at some flowers by the wayside ; she did not feel inclined to talk about the scenery just then.

On the opposite side of the road the precipice rose very steeply from it ; great stones rolled down the hillsides in winter, and blocked up the way, which continually needed clearing and mending. The recent rains had probably worn and loosened some of the rocks above, for as the group still stood talking by the inn-door, and as the carriage waited near them, a large stone came rolling down the hillside, bounded into the road, and struck the leg of one of the horses. The animal reared in terror, then started wildly forward to rush down the steep and difficult descent into the valley before it.

Violet heard it and looked round ; the lady screamed ; there was a rush forwards to help, but Redfern, with that calmness that seemed to arise more in indif-

ference than courage, had sprung forward, first in front of the horses' heads, and seized the reins. He was not accustomed to manage horses, and both the animals were wildly frightened ; in a 'moment he was knocked down on the ground among the prancing feet. For one second every one thought he must be killed ; he believed it himself, and so did Violet ; one blow from those plunging hoofs would have ended it all. In that second the thought in the minds of all was not of Redfern, but of Violet—they understood that she loved him more than he loved himself—but no one looked round at her, as she stood behind them all, with clasped hands and a pale face, uttering no cry. The fear only lasted for a moment ; Mr. Donaldson had run forward then and held the horses in, and some one else put out a hand and helped Redfern to rise unhurt.

By that time a group had collected ; the people from the inn had come out, the groom was holding the horses ; the gentleman was lifting out the frightened children. Redfern spoke to no one, and looked at no one ; he

did not even stop to thank those who had helped him ; his eyes at once sought ,Violet, where she waited trembling and alone, and he made his way silently through the crowd, with an expression in his face that had never been there before.

Nobody had ever known Redfern Hildborough to be afraid of anything, but in that moment when he had expected the horses, hoofs to strike him, he had realized a new sensation, he had understood for the first time how much dearer Violet had made his life to him than it had used to be.

He went to her where she stood alone ; there was a look of awe as well as tenderness in his eyes, and they met hers solemnly, as if after a long parting.

She clasped her two hands over his arm, and bent her head over them.

“ Oh, my darling !” she said, with a low sob, and she leaned trembling against him.

“ There is nothing to mind about,” he answered ; but his voice was very low ; he glanced round at the others, who were all busy about the carriage, then he stooped to kiss her very tenderly, and to say : “ I am

more glad than I can tell you to come back to you again."

There was no more talking of what had happened. Violet walked home with her hand in Redfern's arm, and they did not speak much. One of those awakenings had come to them which are sometimes granted to us to remind us of the lasting and solemn truths we are losing sight of amid the small accidents and fancies of the moment.

CHAPTER VII.

AND I, TOO, CRIED, "THIS QUEST IS NOT FOR
THEE."

EARLY in April it was Violet's twenty-first birthday ; she was to spend it in Scotland. If her grandfather had been alive, there would have been great festivities at Monkholme ; now there would be nothing of the sort. Redfern would come over, and Mr. Donaldson asked if she would care to have any other visitors.

Violet thought of Alfred ; she had seen so little of him for a long time, that the idea of his coming seemed to bring a return of old days. She suggested to Redfern that he might be asked to come for her birthday, and Redfern quite understood her wish and sympathized with it.

Since Redfern and Alfred had met again at Mr. Hilborough's funeral, they had seen a great deal of each other, and formed a closer liking than ever before. Redfern could afford to feel friendly, having got all that Alfred would have liked—he had also been pleased with the manly way in which Alfred had borne his disappointment ; and Alfred himself, now that he was separated from Violet, was all the more interested in Redfern, who was now so closely connected with her. They had exchanged visits, and had planned a walking tour in Scotland together for the middle of April. It was therefore convenient for them to meet at Mr. Donaldson's, and make that their starting-place. When Alfred was invited, it seemed only natural to invite Gerald too, so it was arranged that the three cousins should all be at Mr. Donaldson's for Violet's coming of age. There was a certain fitness in the plan ; they had all been permitted to enter the lists together, and though the prize had been long since awarded, it was a suitable close to their intercourse to have this final meeting before it was quite given away..

No one cared for Gerald's visit ; there was the "he might as well come" sort of feeling about it which is the reason for half the invitations given ; but Violet was glad to have a chance of seeing Alfred once more before she was married, and Redfern liked to think that they would all have an amicable meeting before the strangeness of new ties was entered into. It is pleasant to close old relations in a friendly manner before beginning new ones.

The wedding was to take place in May ; the day had not yet been fixed—that last decision was to be made when Redfern went over for Violet's birthday.

"It is quite time it was made, too," observed Redfern's mother. "I should not wonder if she tried to get out of the arrangement now Mr. Hilborough is dead."

"She is quite welcome to get out of the arrangement if she wishes it," replied Redfern.

"That is just like you ; you never know your own interest ; you don't see that she can please herself now—the money is hers, all the same, if she marries you or that Alfred.

I can't see why you let it be settled so. I am sure you might have managed differently, such a favourite as you were with your uncle.”

“ I did not care to have it any other way.”

“ I am sure there might at least have been a condition, so that she could not get out of it so easily, though I consider it ought to have been left to you—you are the next heir, and it is only what everybody expected ; she ought to have been glad enough to get it by marrying you.”

“ But then I did not want it.”

“ And I think it is very wrong of you to say so,” replied Mrs. Hilborough, rather hotly ; “ if you don't care about yourself, you might care about your mother and your poor-sisters. It does not matter to you, I suppose, what becomes of those children, so long as you have your own fancies.”

“ You are provided for in any case,” Redfern reminded her.

“ I dare say,” replied Mrs. Hilborough plaintively ; “ a paltry two hundred a year, and those children to bring up, and that delicate boy, too. I'm sure you need not

grudge such a little sum to me—I have worked hard enough for you in my time."

"I don't grudge it," said Redfern, goaded to impatience.

"You'll have plenty yourself," continued his mother, in an afflicted tone, "and so will that proud Violet; *she* will have her carriage, I suppose, but two hundred will be quite enough for us, quite enough. Though how those poor little girls are to have new frocks out of it, I don't know. I *did* think, when you were going to marry Violet, that I need not stint them in clothes so much," and Mrs. Hilborough's complaints subsided into tears.

"I know, mother, that you have had a very hard life," replied Redfern quickly. "I'll contrive to let you have some more money if you want it, but don't talk about Violet's money; it is not ours at all."

"It will be yours, unless you choose to let her throw you over; she'll be ready enough to do that if you give her a chance. I believe she always liked that Alfred best—*he* knew how to make himself pleasant to people; now Mr. Hilborough is not here to see that she marries you, I should not wonder

if she gives you up for him after all. I can't understand what made you be so mad as to let Alfred be invited to Scotland. What does she want with anybody but you?"

"If I believed she liked Alfred better than me, I should give her up to-morrow—I know she doesn't; but at any rate, if she would like to be free, as you all of you seem to think she would, I will give her the chance."

"What do you mean?" said Mrs. Hilborough aghast, her flow of eloquence stopped at once.

"I'm going to Scotland next week, either to fix our wedding-day or to break off the engagement. I'll do whichever she likes best; I have been making up my mind for some time that it would be right at any rate to offer her the chance of freedom before it is too late, and now you have convinced me that I ought to do it."

Redfern spoke in a tone of hard decision.

"I thought you said she liked you really," objected Mrs. Hilborough, in real distress.

"So she does; but she knows my faults now better than she did when she promised

to marry me, and she is so generous that she would never utter a regret. At any rate, no one shall say I sacrificed her to her grandfather's wish, or even to her own promise. It is only right that she should have a chance of freedom now she knows better what sort of a person I am to get on with, and she shall have it."

"But you have always been good to her, have you not?" asked his mother in a frightened tone, "and I thought she was so fond of you?"

"You know I am of a sweet temper, mother," answered Redfern, with an unpleasant laugh, "and I have given her more than one proof of it."

"You are a better young man than any other she is likely to find," replied Mrs. Hilborough quickly.

"Do you think so?" responded Redfern.

Mrs. Hilborough went on with her work silently for a little time; she was too much scared to grumble any more, for she was always afraid of her son when he had expressed any strong determination. At last she stopped and looked at him doubtfully.

“I am afraid she liked that Alfred best ; she has known him so long, and she has not seemed in a hurry to marry you.”

“She has behaved unselfishly in that as in everything else,” replied Redfern, without looking up.

“It is easy to be unselfish when one has everything one wants,” said Mrs. Hilborough querulously. After a few minutes she resumed, in an anxious tone, “Don’t give her the chance, Redfern ; I am afraid she will take it.”

“Then she shall,” replied Redfern quietly ; “but,” he added, half smiling at his mother, “I don’t think she will.”

He said no more. Mrs. Hilborough kept glancing at him as she sewed, and saw a grave and uneasy expression on his face ; she did not dare to say any more to him, but when she rose and had folded up her work, she went to him rather nervously and put her hand on his shoulder.

“If she does throw you over, Redfern, it will be because she does not know what you are worth,” she said.

Redfern threw his head back and looked

up at her with a sad and weary expression.

“ Do you think so ?” he observed drearily.

“ Yes. There is some one who knows what you are, my boy, if that silly girl does not.”

She stooped and kissed his forehead awkwardly and timidly, for caresses had long ceased to be ordinary things from her.

“ Thank you, mother,” said Redfern, gravely raising his head again ; then he added, with a smile, “ but she is not a silly girl.”

“ She will be, if she does not marry you,” replied Mrs. Hilborough as she left the room.

She went upstairs, first to grumble at the other children and scold the servant unreasonably, next to cry privately over the disappointment she feared for “ her boy.” It was long since she had cried before for any loss of his. If nobody else would be good to him, her turn had come again.

But Redfern had sat silently meditating where she had left him ; he had put his head down on his arm as it lay on the table. He tried to realize to himself that if he made

Violet an offer of freedom, it might be taken, but it was difficult for him to comprehend that prospect.

Ever since he had so narrowly escaped on the mountain road in Scotland, the thought had occurred to him again and again, “Would it not have been better for Violet if I had not escaped then ?”

He could not answer it negatively, and he dared not answer it affirmatively. She would have grieved for him passionately, he did not doubt, but afterwards her cheerful nature would have recovered its buoyant tone, she would for ever have been free from an affection which brought her so much trial and disappointment, she would have learnt to care for some one else.

He knew that even in her own heart she had never regretted her choice of him, but that was because of the loyalty and constancy of her nature ; the fact remained that her engagement to him had brought at least as much anxiety and vexation as it had given her pleasure, and that her marriage to him would bring her more than ever into a life of renunciation and unsatisfaction ; the more she

loved him, the more she must be wounded and disappointed by his constant failure to be what he would have chosen. Would not a little sharp pain be better for her in the end than years of patient endurance and of forgiving and sacrificing affection ? He dared not say that it would not be.

Ever since Mr. Hilborough died, the fact that Violet was being sacrificed in marrying him had been forcing itself more and more strongly on his mind. Every one except herself saw that she was choosing a lot where she gave all and took nothing in return. Her friends regretted her engagement as a misfortune, they saw distinctly that her real welfare must be found in another path of life from his, and Redfern's own mother perceived that it would be to Violet's advantage to discard him, and take a more agreeable husband in his stead. Redfern himself felt hopeless of giving her all she ought to have. He had realized with horror as he lay on the ground among the horses' feet and expected instant death, that his last words to Violet had been unkind, that he had received her tenderness coldly,

and even rejected her forgiveness harshly ; that he had been on the point of quarrelling with her who had never given anything to him but sweetness and patience.

Yes, she would be best free ; they had been engaged for a year now, and she must understand how little satisfaction could be obtained from his affection ; he could not keep her tied down to an old contract because she was too loyal to wish it broken. She should have a chance of freedom, and take it if she chose ; if not—well, then they would be married very soon ; he was tired of vexation and suspense, he was in a hurry to have everything settled, he was sick of waiting and of absence, he felt eager to get into that new life from which there would be no turning back, the region that lay beyond doubt and beyond choice. Life would seem easier to him and more free from self-reproach when once she was his wife, when their lives were linked too closely together for any person or circumstance to come between, when he could accept her as his own, knowing that it was too late to offer to let her go, and when he could ask her to forgive him and to love him

through everything. Then indeed her goodness, which he felt now as a debt which he never could repay, and her tenderness, which seemed always like a reproof to his own unreasonableness, would be only a help and comfort to him ; they would no longer appeal to his generosity against hers.

He must make his offer, however, with a mind prepared for having it accepted if she so chose ; the future was a kind of blank to him with such an idea in the present. Violet was the sunshine, the fresh air of his life, the appeal to his better nature, the suggestion of happier things, the assurance of hope and of a higher life than he always perceived ; without her he could imagine no existence worth dreaming of ; he thought with horror of the possibility of falling back for ever into the old hard unsympathetic life he lead at home. When he raised his head and went away, the expression of his face was not exactly desponding ; it had that sad courage of one who is resolved to accept loss, and so remains conqueror even of failure and defeat. Mrs. Hilborough saw that he adhered to his resolution. She said nothing more about it,

she ceased to grumble at him, she ironed his shirts with extraordinary care, and looked after his clean boots with unusual solicitude ; any peculiar tenderness she felt for him at this period she put into the cooking of his chop and the packing of his portmanteau when he went away ; for the rest, she contented herself with scolding the children unreasonably and crying privately in her own room.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER THE FIR-TREES.

It was bright spring weather. The mists and rains of winter had rolled themselves away in white snowy clouds over the blue sky. There was a richness of wakening life throughout the earth, the streams were full of water, noisy and strong in their spring rapidity, rushing over obstacles, foaming among stones, swirling in long rippling circles over the green bent grass, where their banks were low and flat. The birds were singing with happy loudness, all the hills had broken a way for themselves out of the clinging mists, and came out grand and large with freshened colours against the sky.

It was only two days before Violet's birth-

day ; she was walking in the garden with Redfern—not in her own garden at Monkholme, but in Mr. Donaldson's in Scotland. All about them the hills rose in larger and grander forms than those around her own home, but there was not the same serene air of beauty and domesticity ; the worn old steps, the mossy pillars, the sleepy pond with the lazy lilies lying on it, were not there, nor the church tower in the distance, nor the sound of the stream going down through meadows. Redfern was there, however, and that was the principal thing. Alfred had arrived, and so had Gerald. Violet had met Alfred with her hand on Redfern's arm, and had talked to him from the other side of Redfern. There was a new shyness in her behaviour to him ; her eyes were interested, but her manner was reserved ; there was solicitude, rather than frankness, in her kindness now. Nevertheless, she had been very much pleased to see him again, and had enjoyed having a long conversation with him. Her face had grown very bright and happy as they spoke together of old times, and her laugh rang out with such careless joyousness,

that Redfern looked at her a little sadly, well aware that her intercourse with him brought no such cheerfulness, such easeful delight.

Violet treated Gerald with an added measure of dignity now she was soon to be Redfern's wife ; she understood the importance reflected from him more clearly than she had perceived her own. Gerald was just the same as ever ; he showed the usual amount of emptiness and self-satisfaction in his behaviour.

“ I must congratulate you, Letty, on coming of age, or I suppose I must congratulate Redfern instead. I never thought you were the lucky sort of fellow to come in for this kind of thing. Alfred must feel uncommonly queer just at present ; I wonder he liked to show himself.”

Gerald had not lost the faculty of saying the wrong things and vexing everybody. He spoke to Redfern about his engagement afterwards.

“ How did it come about ?” he asked ; “ was it the old gentleman or Letty herself who wanted it ? The old gentleman, I suppose ; it always seemed to go for everything with

him that you were the eldest. I wonder, though, that Letty does not try to break it off now she can please herself. I suppose you never expected that sort of a will. I should look sharp and get it ended, if I were you, for fear of her turning skittish."

"We have made nearly all our arrangements, thank you," observed Redfern gravely, "and so do not need your advice."

"Well, I suppose you feel safe, or you would never have had Alfred down here; it looks odd that she should be so glad to see him, and 'pon my word I never saw anything like the way they talk to each other. I wonder you don't get frightened a little; I should look after her pretty well, if I were you—it is not too late for her to change her mind."

"Of course not, if she likes to change it."

"Ah, you don't feel afraid then? Well, women take odd notions sometimes, and you may be right; it's remarkable what unlikely people they choose to be pleased with occasionally. I should not like to count on such out-of-the-way tastes, though, myself."

I am very glad I never went in for Monkholme, like you two."

Mr. Donaldson at once took a great liking for Alfred; Redfern's character did not please him so well. With the rest of the world, he thought him an odd young man, on whom a charming woman was obliged to throw herself away; he was, besides, quick to perceive that the intercourse between Violet and Redfern was not always smooth and pleasant; knowing Violet's disposition, he therefore judged Redfern's severely.

Alfred, on the other hand, had a fine appearance, a cheerful tone of mind, pleasant manners, and an even temper. Violet's mind seemed at ease when she was with him, while there always appeared to be some anxiety in her affection for Redfern.

Mr. Donaldson had again been compelled to discuss some business matters with Redfern; he found him, as he thought, extremely unpractical, and even unreasonable. He had felt obliged to express his own opinion rather strongly.

Redfern had suggested that some expensive elements of the establishment at Monkholme

were really useless, as they were only kept up for appearance, and brought some trouble but no comfort.

“It is what Miss Hilborough has been used to, and what her grandfather would not have wished to see changed,” Mr. Donaldson replied.

“Oh, if Violet likes it, of course, but I don’t imagine she does.”

“She would make no objection if you asked her to give it up—she is not the sort of character to assert her own wishes against yours; I think that on that account you ought to ask no more sacrifices from her than you can help.”

The tone made Redfern look up.

“I should not wish her to give up anything she cared for just to please me.”

“You don’t consider, then, that she is giving up anything already?” asked Mr. Donaldson.

“I don’t know—some things of course,” replied Redfern, feeling undefinably uncomfortable; “that can never be helped, I suppose, when people marry?”

“The sacrifices, at any rate, need not be

all on one side," remarked Mr. Donaldson, as he rapidly turned over some papers.

"And you think they are?" asked Redfern, with more than curiosity.

"I need not enter into that point. The one thing it is any good considering now is whether you ought not to ask as little as possible from Miss Hilborough. In marrying you, she will change her life a good deal. You dislike society, for instance?"

"Yes," said Redfern; "but that need not affect her."

"A wife, Mr. Hilborough, generally moulds her life on her husband's. Now Miss Hilborough enjoys society and is suited for it."

"Am I to understand," asked Redfern slowly, "that you are proving me unfit to marry Miss Hilborough?"

"Not at all. That question was done with long since. I only want to suggest that as you give your own society instead of all other, you ought to make it as cheerful and agreeable as possible."

"I understand that; and you think I don't?"

“ If you would rather not hear me say any more, Mr. Hilborough, we will return to business ; we have still a good deal to talk about.”

“ No, I would rather hear. Go on.”

“ Miss Hilborough will never speak for herself, there is no one else to speak for her. I have no doubt you are an upright young man, otherwise Mr. Hilborough would not have trusted his granddaughter to you, but it seems to me that however excellent your intentions may be, you make a few mistakes.”

“ No doubt,” said Redfern ; “ that is quite my habit.”

“ You have your own peculiar ideas, which are all very well and good in their place, but you are wrong to force them on a young lady brought up as Miss Hilborough has been.”

“ I have no intention of forcing them on her.”

“ You express them, which is sufficient. You would do well, in arranging your own mode of life, to consider how far it is necessary to change hers. Self-denial on your part may become selfishness, when she is obliged to share it ; you cannot marry an

heiress and expect her to adopt the habits of a poor artist's wife. Sacrifices that are necessary may bring good instead of evil, but unnecessary sacrifices are too great a demand for any one to make without being painfully in debt to those they exact them from."

"I understand you," said Redfern, before whom arose a vision of Violet going out to evening parties dressed in white and shining with jewels, while he attended her and looked after shawls. Could an heiress be expected to give up these things?

"I hope I have not offended you. You seemed to have your eyes shut to some things—I thought it best to open them."

"I am glad to have heard your opinion. You think, no doubt, that Miss Hilborough would have had an easier life if she had chosen to marry another sort of man?"

"I think so, but she pleases herself," replied Mr. Donaldson; and then they returned to conversation on business.

This discussion of money matters was particularly unpleasant to Redfern. So long as Mr. Hilborough lived, the fact of his interest in Monkholme was not forced on his notice,

and might be ignored, almost forgotten. Then some one else decided everything, and had the management of all the property ; now it fell upon him. He was obliged to enter into details, make arrangements, and even choose methods of expenditure, for Violet was not what is called a “business woman,” and wished in everything simply to please him. So he could not escape from the management and the benefit of a property which he had rejected for himself ; he found himself obliged, after all, to take the position he regarded as false and detestable—that of a rich man and landed proprietor who had received his wealth from other hands, and to spend money and make investments, if not for himself directly, for his wife, through whom the advantage of it all came to him.

Redfern had made up his mind to speak to Violet this afternoon on the subject of their engagement, but the task was hateful to him, and he was therefore the more likely to do it ungraciously. They were walking together under the heavy green branches of some Scotch firs ; the trunks looked red in sunlight, and under their feet were the crisp red

spikes that had fallen in former times and covered all the ground, hiding the soil completely.

They had been talking about their wedding-day, and fixing it for the twentieth of the following month. Redfern had not found the courage to utter the ideas that were in his mind; Violet could see that he was serious and abstracted, but he did not seem annoyed, so she was not disturbed.

He began abruptly at last; they had fixed the wedding-day and spoken of plans afterwards, and he added suddenly, “Unless you would rather not marry me at all.”

Violet started and turned to look at him; his eyes met hers gravely.

“Redfern, what do you mean?”

“Just what I said.”

She took her hand away from his arm and trembled very much; she could not look at him or speak to him at first—she did not realize the exact words in which his thought had been uttered, she only comprehended that he had suggested a permanent parting quite calmly and advisedly.

“I don’t understand,” she said, after a

minute, speaking in a constrained voice ; “ have I vexed you in some way ? Only tell me.”

“ You ! how could you ?” he answered impatiently ; he was becoming disturbed and angry. He was hurt that she should have so quickly shrunk from him ; he had hoped for a caress or a tear, and instead she answered with self-control and coldness ; yet the sacrifice he was offering to make appeared, like all his actions, merely an insult and cruelty after all. He had only offended her, and she was ready to accept the offence.

“ Has any one else vexed you, then ?” she asked again, speaking with such an effort that it made her voice sound hard.

“ No ; what would it matter if they had ? They have made me understand a few things more clearly, that is all.”

“ Oh, Redfern, who has been talking to you about it ?” she said, turning to him with more agitation in her face.

“ It is not what any one said to me that makes me speak—don’t mistake about that ; I came here intending to offer to set you free.”

He spoke hardly and abruptly, giving the

worst side of the question. He never doubted that she was sure of his love, to have spoken of it then would have been to make an appeal that would destroy the generosity of his offer.

“Do you mean,” asked Violet, drawing in her breath slowly, “that when I met you yesterday you had this thought in your mind?”

She looked at him with a kindling eye, for she had greeted him with tenderness.

“Yes,” said Redfern, “I had.”

She turned away from him, and spoke coldly.

“That was hardly fair,” she said, “when I had no such ideas; you should have written to tell me first, then I could have received you differently. You must have thought me very silly.”

“Violet!” he said, in a quick, indignant tone, “you know better than that.”

She turned to look at him inquiringly and longingly.

“What does it all mean, Redfern?” she said; “is there not some dreadful mistake somewhere?”

“I don’t know. I seem, as usual, to be behaving atrociously, and I only meant to do a right thing.”

“Don’t you—don’t you,” she began ; her eyes sought his entreatingly, but she could not finish her sentence, and say, “Don’t you love me ?”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Redfern said uneasily ; “I only make the offer—you need not take it.”

“But why should you make it ?” she asked in a low voice ; “is it so easy to break through the old ties ?”

“Easy ! No,” he answered quickly ; “it can’t be anything but extremely hard.”

“Then why—oh, Redfern, think of going home to Monkholme and there being nobody there !”

Her voice was tremulous ; he turned to her and caught her hand in his.

“If you want me, Letty, don’t you know that I will go ?” he asked, drawing her close to him as he spoke.

“But I can’t say I want you, unless you want to come ; how can I ?” she answered, looking up at him.

“ You know very well,” he began, and was stooping to kiss her upturned face, but she hid it away from him on his shoulder, answering quickly,

“ No, no, not yet—not now, not till I understand better, till I know what you mean.”

“ Very well,” he replied slowly, driving his heel into the ground among the fir-cones ; “ as you like.”

“ Have I vexed you, Redfern ?” she asked, clinging to him, with her cheek against his arm ; “ I can’t bear to do that.”

“ I know you can’t,” he replied hoarsely ; “ I only wish you could.”

“ Why should you ?” she asked earnestly.

“ It would be much better for your own sake,” he answered.

“ And for yours ?”

“ For mine, Letty ?” He took her hand from his arm and kissed it, holding it afterwards.

“ Then you do like me a little ?” she said slowly.

“ Had you any idea that I did not ?”

“ How could I tell ?” she answered.

Then they walked on slowly among the

fir-trees, across the sunshine and the shadow on the fir-cones at their feet.

“Now tell me,” she began, in a low voice, “why did you think of changing everything so?”

“Because I see what every one else sees, that we are not suited to one another,” he replied with an effort.

“In what way?” she asked gently.

“My ideas are not yours, and our habits are quite different. You will have to give up a great deal, and put up with still more if you marry me.”

“But if I don’t mind?”

“Then I mind a great deal.”

“I don’t see why you should.”

“How can you wish me to be indebted to any one so much?”

“It is not a debt if we care for each other.”

He was not satisfied, however; he had roused the spirit of opposition in his own mind, and was determined to go on to the end.

“It is no use, Violet—you ought to think about it seriously; all sorts of difficulties will

arise, after we are married, that you have no idea of now."

"We can meet them when they come," said Violet.

"I can't bear you to throw yourself away so blindly," he went on with impatience; "you will find out afterwards what you ought to have done, when it is too late."

"I don't think I shall regret."

"How can you tell?" Redfern went on; "you won't look at anything rightly, and you will be sure to see it so some day; every one else knows that you are choosing the wrong life."

"And do you?"

"Yes," he answered, as if uttering a truth reluctantly.

Violet had no reply ready; her heart began to beat violently again.

"It is very easy," said Redfern with growing impatience, "to make love like a couple of children, and very pleasant to shut our eyes to everything else; but we can't do that all our lives—serious difficulties will come after, if we won't look at them now."

Violet felt suddenly cold and quiet; she

removed her hand from his arm and stood still. At last he had unconsciously said one of those things which wounded her past forgiveness.

“I have not made love like a child,” she answered coldly, standing a little way from him and looking at him steadily; “I have only loved you very earnestly, like a woman.”

“I know,” said Redfern, not comprehending how much he had offended her; “but love does not make us blind to faults—it only gives them power to hurt us more. You made a mistake in ever caring for me—we both made a great mistake; I wonder your grandfather let us do it.”

“It is not too late to undo the mistake,” said Violet, quite calmly. Her face was pale, but she was not trembling, and her voice did not falter.

“No,” said Redfern; “that was why I spoke to you.”

“Will you tell me, please,” she went on, quite gently, but not as if her gentleness belonged to him at all, “if you have ever thought it a mistake before?”

“Many a time,” he said, frowning as he

knocked the fir-cones about with his foot. He had lost his way in the discussion now, and hardly knew what she meant.

“Should you not have spoken sooner then?”

“I dare say. It is not easy to give up a good thing if you have it; but I always knew I ought to do it in the end.”

“For whom is it a mistake? For you or for me?”

“For both of us.”

There was a long pause. Redfern looked up at her at last; there was a solemn calmness in her face, her eyes were bright and cold.

“Tell me now,” she said, “because we may not talk to each other again, why it is a mistake for me?”

“You only chose me out of kindness, because you wanted to make my life pleasanter. I never brought you enjoyment or satisfaction.”

“How do you know?”

“Could I not see? You were willing to bear anything, but enduring is not enjoying. Ask yourself if my love has brought you any

repose or happiness, if your life was not pleasanter before you knew me."

"I don't know that I wanted happiness most."

"Perhaps not. I'll not take it from you, all the same ; what a debt and a remorse you would load me with through life!"

"You don't love me, or you would not feel it so," answered Violet vehemently ; "you never did ! I ought to have seen it before."

"You have your way of loving and I have mine," answered Redfern, "you are better without my love."

"I never had it," said Violet ; "I have been blind ; I was determined to take what you were unwilling to give."

"I don't wonder," said Redfern bitterly, "that you don't believe I can love at all."

Violet gave him a wondering look ; she did not comprehend him in the least.

"Now tell me," she said, "why it was a mistake for you."

"Because I am not fit to be your husband, or any one else's. I have a horrible temper that I can't control. To love me only gives me the power to hurt."

“ Is that all ?”

“ No. The more that is required of me the less I give. I can manage pretty well if people treat me badly, but to give me a chance of kindness is to make me worse than ever. Have I been really wiser and better since you cared for me ? Was I ever so unjust to anybody as to you ? Is it not better for me to get out of this horrible temptation of ill-treating whatever is my own ?”

“ You exaggerate your faults.”

“ I don’t. Your affection only gives me an opportunity of being utterly bad, it shows me myself in a more dreadful light than ever, it makes me hate myself, and yet go on being what I hate.”

“ I never thought of you so.”

“ Think so now then ; the worse you think of me, the better it will be for you.”

“ Good-bye,” said Violet turning away, “ you have chosen for us both.”

“ Have I not done right ?”

“ Perhaps !” she repeated drearily. “ How can I tell ? You should know.”

“ Stop a minute, Violet,” he said, “ and look at me. Now tell me this, has any other

person in the world ever brought you such unhappiness as I have?"

His eyes held hers in a solemn look ; her face flushed and went paler. She answered, "No."

"I knew it," he replied, turning away, and looking wretched and hopeless. "I knew it was so. Need I tell Mr. Donaldson to-day?"

"No," answered Violet, starting. She had been so much in the habit of thinking of Redfern before herself, that at once she imagined all the blame that he would receive from every one, and the observations that would be made upon him. "No, there is no hurry ; wait till my birthday—that is only two days—then the people will go. and you can tell. No one need know till then."

"Thank you," he answered drearily, without looking at her. There was no farewell between them ; he heard her step on the dry leaves as she walked away, and they had no last look or word.

Violet went on slowly ; her heart felt quite dead and still within her ; there was no thought there of a last caress, no hope or wish for the future, everything seemed to

have gone out of sight suddenly, life was all a dreary blank in which she walked without interest.

What a miserable place this world was, which had looked so bright to her that morning ! Her thoughts went back to her grandfather's death-bed, to the serenity of that winter day ; she wished she could have fallen asleep then and gone away with him for ever, for life was such a very long time, and yet there was nothing for her between now and the end of it.

She did not feel inclined to weep or complain ; she was exercising no conscious self-control, there was nothing to be felt or said, she thought, and she went on in dreary composure to the house.

CHAPTER IX.

“ THOU HAST NOT LOST THYSELF TO SAVE THYSELF.”

THROUGH all that evening Violet was quiet and composed ; she sat at her work as usual, she answered questions, she looked at those who spoke to her with a calm gaze that seemed to deny any cause for shrinking. Of course Redfern did not talk to her ; he sat at a distance with a book in his hand ; his face was as depressed and wretched as hers was blank and calm ; they avoided each other's eyes, but he heard the even tones of her voice as she talked in a monotonous way to Alfred ; there was no brightness of ever-changing life now in all she said or did ; otherwise she seemed just as usual.

Mr. Donaldson was in the study, busily

examining papers ; he was having a final arranging of all Mr. Hilborough's miscellaneous documents, some of which had been put aside till now. Neither that evening nor the next morning did he ask Redfern to have another conversation with him, so Redfern escaped the difficult position of talking about Violet's fortune, when she never was to be his wife.

Was she never to be ? He watched her furtively as she sat with her face turned from him ; there was an inexpressible dreariness in her complete composure, her eyes seemed cold and wearied, as if they gazed so steadily only with a great effort ; and he himself was more unhappy than he was willing to believe : was it not too late for them to be parted now ?

Violet went to bed early ; it was evident to every one in the room that something was amiss between her and Redfern ; she said good-night to him half-doubtfully, and looked away as she spoke it.

When she came down in the morning she was still composed ; her face was very pale, and there was something unusual in her voice, that was all. Redfern glanced at her, and

hated himself more than ever ; he did not dare to speak to her, but he put a chair for her silently, and then kept out of her way as much as possible.

The reaction had come after his obstinate determination. He asked himself why, after all, he should have given up what he loved so much. Other men were not expected to make such sacrifices. Violet was content to take him ; why should he save her in spite of herself ? His face was dark and troubled, his manner uneasy and disturbed ; he could rest nowhere, and do nothing ; every one in the house conspired to leave Violet to him, and he dared not speak to her, and could not resolve to go altogether out of her way. She was aware that he haunted her presence, though he avoided her notice ; she ignored him altogether—there was nothing else for her to do.

Mr. Donaldson had gone away somewhere early in the morning ; he had seemed absorbed in serious thoughts, and had no attention to give to outward things ; he had therefore missed seeing what was so obvious to every one else—that Violet and Redfern did not talk to each other as usual.

“Something is up between those two,” Gerald remarked delicately to Alfred, “could not you cut in and win after all?”

Miss Donaldson did not perceive so much as the others could ; she was occupied in her own affairs and left her young guests a great deal to themselves ; she also understood little of the ways of engaged people.

The morning passed away at last ; it was a dreary time ; there were so many moments when Violet and Redfern were thrown together, and when it would have been natural to address each other, and always the new and curious feeling of estrangement obliged them to keep apart.

Violet avoided looking at Redfern, and so did not see how the brightness had gone out of his face, and left it hopeless and darkened ; but Redfern looked at her, and wondered how she could be so calm, and grew angry and desperate at being left so entirely out of her life.

In the afternoon they met by accident in the hall. Violet was going out alone ; the air of the house oppressed her, the presence of Redfern was too near and too possible for her to breathe freely in it. Redfern was coming

out of a room with a dreary, patient look in his eyes that would have touched her greatly in other days ; he stopped doubtfully when he saw her, and looked at her silently. She did not look at him ; she went on towards the door, only stopping to get her umbrella from the stand. It had got fast among the others, or she was too nervous to pull it out easily ; there was a moment's pause, then a hesitating step came behind her—Redfern reached the umbrella and put it into her hand ; she took it and moved away hurriedly without looking at him, but he saw that her hand trembled very much.

“Violet !” he said despairingly.

She turned to look at him in a frightened way, and answered nothing.

“I can't stand this any longer,” he said quickly, “it is dreadful.”

“Don't, please !” she said, in a voice sharpened by pain ; “let me go !”

She was afraid of her self-control breaking down ; she dreaded to speak to him yet ; she only longed to escape.

“Very well,” he answered, “I will write, and not speak.”

She went straight past him into the open air ; everything was so changed for her that she hardly knew herself now ; she did not comprehend her own thoughts or wishes ; she felt hunted and frightened ; she wanted to escape from everything and everybody, above all, from Redfern and herself.

She walked till she was tired, and then she came in with a slow and weary step. Redfern must have been watching for her ; he was lingering about the hall when she came in.

He went forward with a certain humility in his manner and spoke quietly.

“ You look so pale, Violet ; are you very tired ? ”

“ I don’t know,” she answered drearily and absently, as if indifferent to his presence. She had paused as he spoke to her, and stood looking at him with quiet, hopeless gray eyes.

He took her umbrella from her, and for one moment they stood together there.

Neither of them spoke ; Redfern was miserably dissatisfied, but he was ashamed to force himself on her attention any more. When she turned, however, to move away, he broke the silence.

“Violet,” he said, in a low voice, “don’t you hate me now?”

“I don’t know,” she answered again, and the answer was true.

He uttered a low, impatient exclamation and turned away.

Violet went up to her own room ; the chief thought that occupied her mind was not Redfern, but the fact that to-morrow would be her birthday. It was a miserable coming of age for her ; she felt rather sorry for herself, and wished she might have been happy for a few days longer ; anything more than that it did not occur to her to wish.

Lucy, her maid, was in her room waiting for her.

“There’s a letter for you here, Miss Hildborough,” she said ; “Mr. Redfern asked me to give it to you when you came in ; and Mr. Donaldson came back half-an-hour ago, and told me to ask you to go into the library as soon as you had dressed and were at liberty.”

“Very well,” said Violet quietly, stretching out her hand for the letter, and then drawing it back as she remembered that she must wait before opening it. She removed

her hat and jacket, and allowed Lucy to put them away without showing any signs of hurry or impatience ; she sat quite still, her hands lying listlessly on her knee, and her eyes looking dreamy and distant.

“ You may go,” she said, when Lucy had finished ; “ I will ring when I want you again.”

Lucy went out, and she was left alone ; she was sitting on a low chair by the dressing-table, on which lay Redfern’s letter ; she had not even touched it yet, though she had remembered it all the time. She put out her hand and took it ; her eyes filled as she gazed at it, and her heart beat visibly ; that little scrap of paper meant so very much to her : perhaps it was the last she would ever receive from him. It was all so familiar and dear to her : she knew the careless writing so well, and the impatient way of running the letters into one another. She did not know what was inside it—at least, the outside was like the old letters she had treasured up, there was no unkindness in that ; she did not open it at once, but kissed it instead, then laid the letter on the table and put her head down on it, hiding her face in her hands.

She sat so for a little time ; there seemed some comfort in having any words of his so near to her. How could they hurt her till she opened and read them ? Meanwhile, they were hers, a new communication from him ; she did not feel so completely separated from him while she held his writing in her hand and knew that the thoughts there were addressed to herself.

She was not eager to read them at once ; they might only vex and grieve her. Why should she read them at all ? Had not Redfern wounded her enough already ? Why should she give him the power of doing it again ? She was safe from his cruelty so long as she held that letter still sealed in her fingers. She had hardly the courage to open it, even when she was tired of sitting there silently. She shrank back from the chance of a new pain. “ Why should I listen to what he says, so long as he does not care about hurting me ? How can he be so unkind when I love him so much ? ”

She prayed passionately that it might not be a cruel letter ; it seemed to her possible to influence or alter the thoughts in it before

she opened and read it ; afterwards it would be too late. She had no friend to speak to or ask help from, so she appealed quite simply to the Friend she had been taught to trust in all her life, to the God whom her father had taught her to believe was a dearer father still to her.

“ Don’t let it be unkind,” she uttered, with impassioned entreaty, “ or don’t let me read it ; for, indeed, how can I bear any more ? ”

But Violet could bear a great deal more than that, or, at least, could suffer it.

She opened the letter at last, and read it through steadily ; it was short, and hurriedly written. It began,

“ DEAR VIOLET,”

“ I am afraid I expressed myself, as usual, in a horrible manner yesterday, and said a great deal that I did not mean. You know that I have always had a dreadful temper, and shall never get rid of it ; why do you let it vex you then, or mind it at all, except to make you despise me, or be sorry for me, just as you like ? You will do the latter in a little while, I know, because it is your way.

“I will not ask you to forgive me, because I don’t deserve it, but I hope you don’t think I could have any reason for wishing to break off our engagement except your interest. If you would like it to go on after all, you have only to say so, and we will be married, as arranged, on the twentieth.

“Yours always (if you choose it),
“REDFERN HILBOROUGH.”

Violet rose when she had read it. She drew her head back and stood erect: there was no one to see her, yet she looked before her with both dignity and pride, as if she answered some one’s speech by her attitude. All her face expressed a defensive scorn, which included herself, but went out also to others.

That letter of Redfern’s had affected her as some others had done before; it touched all the woman’s pride of her nature; whatever affection there might be behind its blundering tone, she could only at first see and reply to the expressions which had offended her. She felt contemptuous both of herself and Redfern at such a moment; she could have laughed at

them both, in a bitterness half-sad, half-compassionate. They loved each other, and he could write to her so!

If he had acknowledged no offence, if he had expressed no self-control, if he had even accused and blamed her, but had only said : “I love you so much, can’t we be friends again ?” she would have answered the appeal without hesitation or pride. But he spoke rather of his faults than of his love ; he remembered his unworthiness rather than her distress ; he could think at such a time that the vexation about his temper would be in her mind rather than the pain of their parting ;—if his love had been more complete, more self-forgetful, he would have disregarded his own failures, and thought only of comforting her.

His letter made her feel quite strong and proud. She did not want his pity or his conciliation—his love would have been different ; she felt as she had done occasionally before, the strength that lies in utter loss. She could have said in her heart, “ You have taken all from me, even the right to pity or to regret, and now I see how much is left—

all myself." Her individual soul asserted itself as it can only do in such moments ; she stood bare of all the hopes and sympathies of life, and yet she found that she retained still the larger half of her universe, and could stand erect against all the rest.

The letter had to be answered ; she sat down to do it. She had no wish to be unjust to Redfern, and no desire to let false pride stand between them when their hearts were still true to each other ; but she could not answer such an explanation with tenderness, nor could she accept an offer made professedly for her sake.

Did he really love her, or had he only been persuaded by the novel pleasure of her friendship into believing so ? It was quite possible that beneath that tone of self-disgust there was still much affection for her ; he might not dare to appeal to her compassion by speaking of it, because he knew she could not resist such an appeal. He might think that she knew he loved her, and be too generous, after his late conduct, to force that claim upon her ; and so, for want of a little

patience on her part, they might each lose what they cared for most.

But, again, even if he really loved her, he might be glad to be free from the restraint which such an attachment imposed upon him ; his independent and impatient spirit rebelled against anything that was like a claim, though the tenderness of his nature gave freely where nothing could be demanded. Violet hardly knew how to answer him ; she could not bear to give him up, and let him endure the loss of her, through some verbal misunderstanding, and yet she could not force herself upon him, giving herself back at the first reluctantly-uttered word.

She took her pen, however, and wrote this reply :

“ DEAR REDFERN,

“ I don’t quite know how to answer your letter ; perhaps I don’t really comprehend what you mean to express by it. I think it is better not to do anything in a hurry, or we may both be sorry afterwards, so we will wait a little yet, till we know more clearly what we wish. If you will go

down to the fir-trees to-morrow afternoon—
which is my birthday—I will come to you
there, and we will try to understand one
another.

“I don’t change or get tired so easily as you
do, so I must at least remain,

“Always your friend,

“VIOLET HILBOROUGH.”

The last sentence—she added hastily, and
looked at doubtfully afterwards; but it was
hard to utter none of all the reproach and
tenderness she was feeling. So she sealed
the letter, addressed it, and put it down on
the table; then sat looking at the envelope.
“Redfern Hilborough, Esq.”—it was
odd to think of him as of a stranger; in a
very short time he should have been her
husband, and she would have written his
name always with a kind of loving pride.
She bore the same name as he, and had signed
herself all her life Violet Hilborough; but how
differently she would have thought of the
name when it came to her again from him,
and she was Violet Hilborough no longer
because her parents had been called so, but

because she belonged to Redfern, and was called by his name.

Violet Hilborough — Redfern's wife — meant so much, that she would have lingered over the signature, and been happy in writing it ; but Violet, Redfern's cousin, the heiress of Monkholme, meant nothing, and was no one in life. So it seemed to her as she sat there looking regretfully at the letter ; for indeed her life had no purpose in it without him. She had devoted herself wholly to his happiness, and had formed no ties elsewhere ; neither mother, sister, brother nor friend wanted her very much ; she had been content to have only Redfern, and she had lost him ; to fill her life with his requirements, and her life was empty ; it had become an inscription of which time had carried away the meaning, a type, of which there was no longer any reality.

She had forgotten everything but her own thoughts, when Lucy tapped gently at the door and came in.

“ It is more than time to dress, Miss Hilborough,” she said ; “ I thought perhaps you were forgetting, and Mr. Donaldson is in the

library, and has sent to know if you have come in."

"Yes, I had forgotten," said Violet, rising at once, and submitting to be dressed for the evening.

She looked at herself in the glass when she was ready, and hardly knew her own face. She was generally bright and smiling, with glowing eyes and cheeks; now she looked pale and listless; her eyes were sad and still, but there was a sweet and patient wistfulness in her face which made up for all the freshness lost. Everything about her was pale that evening; she wore a dress of a faint, sweet blue, and there was a delicate rose in her hair, just tinted with pink. Alfred Hildborough had sent it up for her, and Violet accepted it indifferently, for she was used to receiving all sorts of kind little attentions from him.

"You do look nice to-night," said Lucy, surveying her criticisingly, as she was always permitted to do; "if only you had a little more colour. But I don't know," she added doubtfully, "you look best, perhaps, without."

Violet smiled a little, but with sorrowful eyes :

“ What does it matter ? ” she said, “ I shall do very well,” and then she went down-stairs and took her way to the library.

CHAPTER X.

A FINAL CHOICE.

HER entrance seemed to take a pale radiance into the gloomy room ; the faint tints of her dress and its airy folds brightened up the darkness there. There was no other colour in the place that was not dull and sombre ; the high, dark bookshelves, the musty old books bound in calf, with no brilliancy of gilt or new cloth, the heavy, old-fashioned furniture, all contributed to produce a gloomy effect in the room. Mr. Donaldson was there with the three young men, but all of them, except Alfred, seemed to belong to the place, and to suit its melancholy appearance. There was no brightness of youth about any one of them, except him : Mr. Donaldson was large and tawny, Gerald faded and insignificant,

and Redfern had none of the animation which could brighten his face into a look of youth and freshness—he looked dark and dull and desponding, that was all; there was no eagerness in his expression or brilliancy in his eyes.

Alfred, on the contrary, looked splendidly handsome; his good looks were of the sort certain to show to advantage at such a moment, when all were waiting, few were interested, and most were tired. His appearance did not depend at all on the varying influences of animation or action; his beauty was that of colour and form, and remained the same in his most passive moments. He looked a model of youthful strength and grace, a little indolent in his careless ease, a little indifferent in his calm prosperity. He was the only one of the four who at all seemed to match Violet in her sweet though quiet bloom.

When Violet entered, Redfern turned his eyes towards her at once; he hoped to find in her face an answer to his letter. She had always forgiven him so readily before, that he half expected she would glance at him

with a smile which would have changed everything without the need of words.'

She did not look at him, however ; she had evidently perceived him as she entered, and so avoided glancing that way. His countenance fell a little, he was disappointed at once ; but he went forward quietly, and placed a chair for her. Alfred rose too, and offered her a seat at the same moment ; Violet went steadily on and took the one he gave her, which was a long way from Redfern's end of the room.

Redfern sat down silently, and rested his head on his hand ; he did not raise his eyes from the carpet for a long time afterwards ; he looked bitter and desponding, for he believed that Violet was determined not to forgive him. He imagined that he had expressed himself clearly in that letter ; he did not fancy for a moment that Violet could doubt its meaning. She knew very well that he loved her ; he had never said anything that could lead her to believe otherwise ; she was angry because of his unreasonable behaviour, but she knew now that he had repented it, and if she had willed a reconciliation, she had

only to accept it ; evidently she was resolved not to accept it, and the sacrifice he had so foolishly urged was to be forced upon him.

At that moment there was little good or tender feeling in his heart ; he felt sullenly miserable. He had made a great effort to undo his folly, and the effort had been useless ; the old defiance of his early days slumbered always within him, it was roused again now ; he had been rejected as hopelessly wicked and hateful, and was therefore ready to accept his wickedness and hatefulness, and fling them like a gauntlet in the face of the world. He had more self-control now than in his boyhood ; he sat merely quiet and gloomy, feeling an outcast in his heart, though none of them guessed it, least of all Violet.

No one knew why Mr. Donaldson had sent for them all, and no one was particularly interested ; it was some business form, doubtless, which he wanted them to go through, and it would affect nothing important.

Mr. Donaldson, however, had a very serious face, and began to speak in a grave tone.

“I have something very important to communicate to you, Miss Hilborough,” he said, as he took some papers in his hand and turned to her; “it cannot astonish you more than it astonished me; it has taken me so by surprise, that I have hardly known how to act. It is certain, however, that I ought to inform you of it, and under these peculiar and unexpected circumstances I have chosen to tell you of it first in the presence of such of your relatives as happen to be in my house, that it may be well understood afterwards how it all happened.”

He paused as if he expected Violet to say something, she answered simply, “Yes,” and he went on slowly.

“You will find yourself placed suddenly in a position which you will perhaps think annoying and embarrassing; fortunately, as circumstances stand, it will be nothing worse than that, and you have to fear no serious loss or difficulty.”

Violet assented again; she did not understand in the least what all this meant, nor did any of the young men; the Scotchman’s calm and deliberate manner deceived them—

they thought there was nothing really important to be revealed.

“In announcing an unpleasant discovery to you, I must inform you that up to this moment no one is aware of it but myself; I came across an important document late last night, as I looked through some loose papers of the late Mr. Hilborough’s which were not supposed to be of any consequence. This document was not known to exist by me or by any one else; on bringing it thus accidentally to light, I was much disturbed and perplexed; I therefore went without delay this morning to obtain legal advice on the point. Unfortunately, legal advice is not easily obtained in this part of the world; I missed seeing the only solicitor within a convenient distance, and returned home without having ascertained anything at all. The document, as you have probably guessed, is a will of the late Mr. Hilborough.”

Mr. Donaldson paused for a moment after having made this important announcement. No one was much affected by it. Violet merely gazed with a dull wonder before her, not feeling astonished that other changes

could come to her after the last great one. Redfern was not concerned in the matter now Violet's life was separate from his ; Alfred did not suppose the will would affect him at all. Gerald was the only person who showed any curiosity ; he had a vague idea that because he had been always left out of the wills before, he ought certainly to come in now.

“ When I went to Monkholme to see Mr. Hilborough in his last illness,” continued Mr. Donaldson, in his strong distinct voice, rolling out his consonants grandly, and attending carefully to his punctuation as usual, “ he showed me three wills made by him at different times ; the last, which was, however, unsigned, he destroyed with the first in my presence ; the second of the three he intended to leave as his last will and testament, and he died believing that he had done so.”

Mr. Donaldson paused again ; Alfred changed his position a little, Gerald coughed rather feebly, but no one hazarded an observation.

“ The document I discovered last night is however an earlier copy of the last of the

three wills ; it was evidently the first rough draught of it, but it is properly signed and attested, and remains by its date the last and therefore the only legal will of Mr. Hilborough. Either Mr. Hilborough had forgotten the existence of this first draught, or he imagined it had been destroyed long before."

Violet raised her eyes, Gerald moved his chair noisily, Alfred drew in both his feet, and leaned forward in an attitude of attention ; Redfern alone remained perfectly still, with his head resting on his hand, and his eyes fixed upon the floor.

" By the second of the three wills, as you are all aware, the whole property in money and land went to Miss Hilborough on her marriage to any one of her half-cousins, with no conditions as to time and place ; by the third will, of which I have just discovered a copy, the property is left to her in the same way, but with the condition that her marriage should take place on or before her twenty-first birthday."

" Which is to-morrow," said Alfred.

" Which is to-morrow," assented Mr. Donaldson.

Gerald uttered under his breath an exclamation that “Here was a pretty go!”

Violet’s face flushed crimson ; she turned and looked instinctively towards Redfern, but his eyes were on the ground still, he did not lift his head. The flush faded out of Violet’s cheek, and the soft sudden light from her eyes ; she bent her face low down and was silent.

Mr. Donaldson resumed : “Whether this will could have held good if it had been discovered after to-morrow, I do not know. It was certain that the testator believed every copy of it to have been destroyed, although this one has been accidentally preserved ; it could also have been proved that the persons most concerned were willing to fulfil the conditions of the will if they had known them to exist ; still it might have been impossible to avoid a law-suit, which can now be easily escaped. The document has been discovered in time for the conditions of it to be fulfilled, it only therefore remains to fulfil them.”

Mr. Donaldson was silent ; he had finished his explanation, and waited for some one to speak.

“ I don’t quite understand,” said Violet, in a low but clear voice, glancing with a perplexed look at Alfred, as if she felt him her only sure friend there; “ what is it I am expected to do?”

Mr. Donaldson cleared his throat.

“ You may find the course forced upon you inconvenient and agitating; fortunately, it cannot be really distressing to any one; it only hastens an event which would have taken place later on.” Violet trembled and flushed, but kept her head drooping, with her face in the shadow. “ You were to have been married next month, you must be married to-morrow instead.”

No one glanced at Violet; even Gerald had the politeness to study his own elaborate boots, for surely now was the moment when Redfern ought to speak.

Violet lifted her head and turned towards him; her lips were parted and trembling, her eyes sought him with a look of troubled appeal, but he never raised his own. In his heart was no hope at that moment, only remorse and despair; he believed he had lost her for ever, just when she had been so nearly his.

Violet's eyes fell again, then they wandered helplessly round the room ; her face grew pale and her lips colourless ; she cast one more hurried and hopeless glance at Redfern, then bent her head again and was quite still.

Mr. Donaldson lifted his eyes from the papers, wondering at so long a silence ; Violet saw the movement, and was compelled to answer it.

“ Oh, I can’t ! ” she uttered suddenly, in a low voice like a cry of pain.

Every one in the room stirred at once, even Redfern raised his head and threw it back with a gesture of proud despair. The worst had come to him ; he thought he heard in those words the final expression of complete anger and dislike ; he set his lips firmly together, and turned his eyes on them all with the defiance of hopelessness.

Gerald uttered a low and prolonged whistle ; Mr. Donaldson looked round with a surprised and disturbed manner ; the mental atmosphere of the room was not at all what he had expected.

“ I am sorry,” he said, with a rather embarrassed air, “ that this should disturb you

so much. Of course, you will feel a little doubt and embarrassment at being obliged to have so hasty a wedding ; I thought there could not possibly be more to object to than that.” There was complete silence. “ Perhaps,” resumed Mr. Donaldson, doubtfully, “ I have made a mistake in announcing this to you so publicly, but as your engagement to Mr. Redfern Hilborough had been so long known to all your friends, I did not think you would care about it.”

There was silence again ; Alfred had risen and was watching Violet ; he crossed the room now and put his hand on Redfern’s shoulder.

“ Why don’t you speak to her ?” he asked quickly ; “ don’t you see that you must ?”

“ I can’t,” answered Redfern bitterly ; “ no one has so little right.”

Violet heard his voice, though it was so low ; she moved her head a little, evidently listening.

“ I don’t quite understand the difficulty that seems to exist somewhere,” said Mr. Donaldson ; “ it is probable that Miss Hilborough feels a little reluctance and confusion

at this moment, but even if there should exist some slight difference at present between her and Mr. Hilborough, that cannot stand between them at such a time. It would be well perhaps that they should have an opportunity of consulting together on a matter of such importance ; I will therefore leave them here to talk it over, and I will speak to them on the subject as soon as they choose afterwards."

"No, no, no!" said Violet passionately, half rising from her seat.

There was nothing she dreaded so much at that moment as being left alone with Redfern, or forced upon him in any way.

"I am afraid," said Mr. Donaldson, with a concerned air, "there is a much more serious difficulty here than I could have imagined."

Redfern rose and stepped forward ; he could no longer bear the thought of what Violet was enduring.

"Why should this matter be forced upon Miss Hilborough at all?" he asked abruptly, "when it is so evidently painful to her. It does not matter so much about her fortune ;

why should she be married unless she likes ? Surely she may be left free."

" Because," answered Mr. Donaldson, turning and looking at him keenly, " her decision now affects her own fortune seriously, and the fortunes of some others for whom she ought to care. Because I cannot believe that from scruples about ceremony a young lady will injure her own prospects for life and the prospects of her sisters ; because, also, I cannot understand how at such a time, whatever misunderstanding may have existed before, a young man and a gentleman, who has been so long engaged to her, who was trusted by her grandfather and friends, can have any hesitation about persuading her to marry without delay, or any doubt about succeeding, unless he is conscious of being more to blame than any one here has supposed."

Redfern met his eye firmly.

" That is because you mistake my position," he replied ; " my engagement to Miss Hilborough was broken off yesterday afternoon."

There was silence again. Alfred had left Redfern, and stood near the door.

“This is a most unfortunate combination of circumstances,” observed Mr. Donaldson, speaking with an effort, “one which I could never have foreseen. I understand little of such affairs, and am deeply grieved that Miss Hilborough has no more intimate friend in whom to confide, and with whom to consult.”

“I don’t need one,” Violet answered, raising her head suddenly and speaking quite calmly; “will you please to tell me what will happen if I don’t carry out those conditions?”

“You will retain an interest in the fortune in money, but have no control over it yourself; the lands will go to your uncle in Canada, Mr. Ralph Hilborough, and your sisters will lose their legacies.”

“Thank you,” answered Violet; “I think I understand.”

She was silent for a moment, and Mr. Donaldson observed, “There is no need for you to speak any decision immediately; fortunately, here in Scotland you can be married at a moment’s notice, and you can take time to think of your position, and speak of it to me later on. It disturbs me more than I can tell you to have placed you in such a difficulty

without being able to help you at all, or even to understand it exactly."

"Thank you," said Violet, "I don't want any time." There was a moment's pause, then she looked at him again ; towards Redfern she had never glanced since she uttered her first passionate objection. "After to-morrow I suppose it could never be altered ? I could not undo the consequences of delay then if I wished ?" she asked.

"Not so far as I comprehend legal matters. You have the opportunity now of fulfilling the conditions of the will—it can never come to you again."

She bent her head down once more, and every one waited, for it was evident that she intended soon to speak again. She sat quite still ; no one could see her face ; she held it down in the shadow, but the light gleamed on the soft folds of her pale blue dress, it touched the pale golden brown of her hair and the faint tints of the rose in it. Her hands were clasped on her knee, she twisted her fingers together restlessly, and her foot in its pretty shoe pressed nervously against the carpet. Redfern guessed the mental

struggle that she tried to hide from them ; he saw the anguish of her eyes and lips as distinctly as if her face had been turned towards him, but he did not guess how the struggle would end ; he knew only that she had rejected him for ever, and he did not imagine that the fortune in land was of much importance to her. She had reasons for thinking it so that he was ignorant of.

Violet was making the decision of her life, or rather, she had made it already ; it had forced itself upon her, and she was struggling for strength to act upon it.

Her own life was over, and the life of others was in her hands. How could she go back home to her mother and sisters, knowing that her own selfishness had ruined their happiness ? She remembered the one sister preparing for the wedding that had been delayed so long, and the other sister trusting in the good fortune that was to bring her health and satisfaction in aspirations that had been disappointed till now, and her mother relying on the help that was to keep herself from trouble and her son from disgrace. Could she send them all back to the life of self-

denial they were just escaping from, and for what? What remained for herself if she did so? Where was she to go, and who would care for her? Would her mother's house be any home to her afterwards, when Monkholme was closed to her? Would her family have any affection to give to her when she had no one else to give it? She wanted some love and comfort bitterly and sorely; she wanted some help and refuge in human tenderness. Would it hurt her to save them all—since her own true life was lost—and trust a little in an affection she needed so very much? She put Redfern out of her mind entirely; he was gone, he was dead to her; if she had had twenty years in which to forgive him and be reconciled, instead of as many hours, she would never have done it then. That moment's silence and averted look had closed her heart to all conciliation for ever; he might have saved her then; he had forsaken her when her own love for him had rendered her helpless and forbidden any appeal; after that there could be no more union between them in any future years.

She knew she could only delay her speech

for a few moments ; she did not wish to delay it longer ; she wanted to take the last decisive step, and turn her face away from her old life at once, shutting the door of it behind her for evermore.

But she waited, because speech was difficult to find, and dreadful to utter ; she had to smother the despair in her heart, and tell them all her decision calmly.

Every one waited too, in silent and uneasy suspense. Gerald was the most indifferent to what happened, and he observed at last, with the ease and calmness of selfish stupidity, “ I think Mr. Donaldson ought to assure my cousin Letty, on the part of Alfred and myself—I am sure I can speak for us both—that as Redfern Hilborough seems suddenly put out of the question—I never thought he was the right man myself—we shall either of us be exceedingly happy to help her to fulfil the conditions of the will as soon as she likes to do it.”

Violet’s arms moved with a shudder, and Redfern glanced wrathfully across at the speaker.

“ Be quiet, Gerald,” said Alfred impa-

tiently ; “you can at least be silent, if you can’t go away.”

But Gerald only thought that last observation unfair, as Alfred did not go away himself.

Violet was at last roused to speak ; she lifted her head with a miserable look to Mr. Donaldson.

“And it must be to-morrow—to-morrow ?—no later than that ?” she asked.

“Yes, to-morrow ; I am sorry—take a little more time to consider—we will go away—you might talk to my sister,” replied her guardian, looking infinitely disturbed.

She did not seem to hear him ; she looked down again, and twisted her hands together ; then she rose, and lifted her head into the light.

Every one looked at her ; she seemed to have prepared herself for some great effort ; her face was quite pale, and her eyes wild and hopeless. She walked slowly across the room ; she had to pass Redfern as she did so, but she took no notice of him, and went on to Alfred, who was standing looking anxious and distressed ; she put out her hands to him

with a blank and piteous look, and said, quite distinctly, but in broken little utterances,

“ Will you take me now, Alfred, after all ? There is no one in the world who loves me really except you.”

Then her head fell forward again, and the great effort being made, she trembled visibly. Alfred caught her with his arm, he held it round her closely, and with a passionate sob, she let her face fall upon his shoulder.

Every one in the room rose at once, and even Gerald wished himself in any other place. Alfred, however, thought of no one but Violet ; he could feel her trembling so much that he was alarmed. He bent over her, whispering hurriedly, “ Letty, darling, don’t ! Never mind it all ; dear Letty, my dearest, you shall be happy yet !” and he kissed tenderly again and again her smooth cold cheek where it was not hidden against him.

He had no feeling of selfish satisfaction at that moment, nor did he mean to ratify the contract she had proposed to him ; his only thought — whatever those present might imagine — was to soothe and comfort her as he had been used to do in the old early days,

when they were sufficient for each other, and Redfern had no part in their lives.

Redfern pushed his chair back with fierce impatience and came forward ; the results of his conduct were much more painful than any he could have dreamt of.

Alfred glanced towards him and spoke angrily, “ Is there nothing you can say, Redfern ? Are you mad, or wicked ? ”

“ Both, probably,” answered Redfern bitterly ; “ in any case, there is no man in the world who has so little right to interfere with anything Violet may choose to say or do now. Have I not meddled with her life enough ? ”

Violet seemed as unconscious of his words as she had been of Alfred’s caresses. She raised her head, and though she had sobbed so convulsively before, her eyes were quite dry and tearless.

“ Will you take me away ? ” she said, appealing to Alfred, and looking at no one else.

“ Miss Hilborough,” said Mr. Donaldson quickly, “ I cannot let you act so hastily in an important matter ; we will leave this question till to-morrow morning.”

“ No,” she answered, “ I have decided. I

know quite well what I mean. Why should I not marry Alfred? he has always been good to me, and there is no one else. I shall come of age to-morrow, you know," she added, "and I can please myself." Mr. Donaldson answered nothing. "Will you take me away?" Violet said again to Alfred. "I have said everything. Surely I may go."

She drew herself away from him and turned to leave them. Alfred followed her silently; she walked erectly at first, but she soon began to tremble again, he put his arm round her supportingly, and they went out so, Alfred closing the door behind them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EVE OF A WEDDING.

THERE was silence for a moment afterwards ; then Mr. Donaldson turned to Gerald. “ I think,” he observed, “ you had better leave us alone.”

Gerald went at once, and Redfern stood waiting ; he was ready to accept any amount of anger. Mr. Donaldson, however, was not eager to express it ; his indignation was too great to be uttered easily. He turned over the papers on the table before he lifted his eye and fixed it on Redfern.

“ Mr. Hilborough,” he said, “ you and Miss Hilborough know how much you are to blame in this matter, no one else can speak of it with certainty.”

“Others can form conclusions,” said Redfern.

“No doubt they can. It would be most difficult and unpleasant for me to express the conclusion I have come to. I never had a favourable idea of your character, but at this moment there is hardly any other man in England whom I would not sooner call my friend.”

“You are perfectly just,” said Redfern; “I hope you don’t imagine any one could have a worse opinion of me than I have of myself.”

“There can only be one subject of congratulation in the affair,” said Mr. Donaldson, “and that is that Miss Hilborough has escaped a marriage which could hardly bring her happiness.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Redfern.

“Then there is nothing to be said further. Of course you are leaving here to-morrow?”

“Of course,” replied Redfern, “to-night if you wish it.”

“By no means; I should prefer you to remain here till I understand everything more clearly.”

Alfred entered as the last sentence was being uttered. He went up to Redfern and put his hand on his shoulder, looking at him earnestly.

“I wonder, on the whole, that you like to touch me,” said Redfern.

“As if I thought of you at all!” replied Alfred. “Can’t you forget yourself for five minutes?”

“I might,” Redfern answered, “if I had any other thing left to think of.”

“There is Violet. You must go and speak to her. It is not too late yet.”

“I!” said Redfern, starting violently.

“Who else? There is some dreadful mistake between you. Go and put it right.”

“And *you* send me.”

“Why not. Do you think I want to secure my happiness at the cost of hers? Is that your way of loving a woman?”

Redfern turned from him and spoke in a low voice.

“It is no use, Alfred, I can’t go. What right have I to speak to her again? You are generous, but it is too late for that. She has chosen you, and not me.”

“That is nonsense ; it is you whom she loves, it is you whom she must marry. Go to her at once.”

Redfern turned to Mr. Donaldson. “Do you say that I may ? I have no rights now.”

“Yes ; go. It is too late to wish that you had never seen her. If you can make your peace with her, do it without delay. It is the best thing left to do.”

“I think you are all mad,” said Redfern ; “I have tried to save her, and she has tried to save herself, but you won’t help us. If I were either of you two, and had the rights you have, I would sooner see myself turned out of the house at this minute than let me speak another word to her.” With which words he left the room.

Alfred had taken Violet to her own sitting-room ; they had spoken no word on the way, and when they reached it Violet sat down and turned to him wearily.

“Will you go away now ?” she said ; “I will see you again after, but I do so want to be by myself.”

“I will go,” Alfred answered gently ; “don’t think, dear, that you shall have me

for a minute longer than you want, and don't be quite miserable ; I will try to put everything right yet."

"Thank you," said Violet, not understanding him, "you are very good to me. I dare say I shall be grateful to you some day, if you will wait."

He went without further words, and then Violet controlled herself no longer ; she put her arms on the table and dropped her head upon them with a feeling of utter desolation. She was too wretched to cry or sob ; she felt stricken down by such a weight of despair, that she had no strength to struggle against it. She felt completely lost and alone ; she seemed to wait in a black silence and solitude for some sign of help to come to her ; her eyes were hidden, but in her heart she watched and listened dumbly and yearningly for some answer to her great need, for something to speak to her or touch her from the great silences about the world.

She was aroused by the sound of a hesitating step ; she lifted her eyes blankly, and saw Redfern standing near her.

He had knocked at the door unnoticed,

and then had ventured to come in ; now he stood waiting.

Her eyes hardly recognised him at first ; they gazed at him drearily, without surprise or interest.

He did not go nearer to her ; there was pity as well as remorse in his look. “Violet!” he said, and added nothing more.

“Redfern!” she answered, as if his voice awakened her. She rose and stood upright, looking at him calmly and fearlessly. “Why have you dared to come here?” she asked.

“I can’t tell,” he answered, humbly, “it was my last chance.”

“No,” said Violet, “your last chance had gone before.”

“Then you will let me say nothing?” he asked.

“To-morrow I shall be Alfred’s wife ; you can judge yourself if it is right for you to be speaking to me now.”

“To-morrow will be too late ; but to-night —will you not hear me yet?”

“I will never hear you. You let me go for want of a single word, that I, a woman, could not utter—and you knew I loved you.”

“ I did *not* know it.”

Violet smiled very coldly.

“ That was a dreadful minute to me ; you must have known it was, and you neither looked nor spoke ; you lost me then, and you could not have me again—never again—though I might marry no one for twenty years. Do you understand me ?” She spoke quite gently now, and looked at him steadfastly.

“ Yes,” said Redfern ; “ I beg your pardon, and I will go.”

“ I wonder,” she said, speaking still with self-possession, “ that you ever dared to come.”

“ I never should have done,” he answered, “ if Alfred had not sent me.”

“ Did Alfred ?” thought Violet, “ he is always generous and kind,” but even that thought left her as the door closed again, and her head fell down wearily on her hands.

The hours passed away slowly and sorrowfully. Violet was too unhappy to seek any other rest than she could find there sitting with her tired and aching head lying on her arms. Mr. Donaldson sent to know if she

would not see him again that night, but she begged to be excused.

She had quite made up her mind, she said ; she knew that she would not change, only she did not want to talk to any one to-night. In the morning she would see him and Alfred too, he could speak meanwhile to Alfred, in whom she trusted entirely ; Mr. Donaldson would know soon that she was quite right to do so. She hoped Mr. Donaldson would make all arrangements for her wedding, she would like to be married as solemnly as possible, so that it might seem almost like a wedding at home.

She sent these messages by Lucy, whose face was the only one she could just then bear to see ; it had belonged to her old home and the memories of her old life.

“Something very strange has happened, Lucy,” she said, looking at her maid wistfully, as if yearning for some womanly sympathy, “I am going to be married to-morrow.”

“Really,” said Lucy, flushing and beaming, “that is sudden, Miss Hilborough.”

“It is because of Mr. Hilborough’s will,” Violet said.

“I hope you don’t mind about it being in such a hurry,” said Lucy sympathetically, “you *do* look pale to-night. Perhaps that was what put you out before. Mr. Redfern, I suppose——”

“It is not Mr. Redfern,” said Violet, her face crimsoning at once, though her eyes did not fall, “it is Mr. Alfred Hilborough.”

“Oh, indeed, miss,” answered Lucy, turning away, and not adding another word.

Miss Donaldson persisted in coming in to see Violet; her brother was very anxious about his ward, and was much disturbed to think that she had no friend near her at this time; he comprehended that she must long to relieve her heart in some confidence to a woman who could understand and comfort her, so he begged his sister to go.

Violet could not refuse to see Miss Donaldson, especially at such a time, but she could not bear to receive pity from any one for her great loss, and she could still less endure to hear any implied censure of Redfern; the tie between them had been too close and too lately broken for her to suffer any handling of it from strange fingers.

She received her hostess quite calmly, and seemed to be ready for no condolence ; there was dignity and reserve in her manner, as if she did not comprehend that condolence was needed.

Miss Donaldson was the least at ease of the two ; her manner was nervous and anxious, for she was disturbed out of her usual calm preciseness, and felt that something was required of her, without understanding what. She knew that some one ought to talk to Violet and try to find out her feelings and wishes, helping her to see them clearly herself and to decide prudently afterwards ; but she herself had no idea how to speak ; the prim habits that had not destroyed her kindly heart had narrowed its powers of action, and the crisis that would have aroused some women to unusual force of sympathy, only rendered her helpless and frightened.

She advised Violet to do nothing in a hurry, above all, not to marry any one she did not really like ; but Violet assured her composedly that she was not acting in a hurry, and that she really liked Alfred Hildborough—she had liked him all her life.

Then Miss Donaldson suggested with still more awkwardness and hesitation that she ought not to marry him if she still liked Mr. Redfern Hilborough, and Violet answered quietly, looking at her with clear and calm grey eyes, “Don’t you think it will be kind of my friends not to speak to me any more of my cousin Redfern Hilborough?”

It was long since she had called him “my cousin;” the appellation sounded strange in her own ears after having known him in so much nearer a relationship.

“Yes, if you are quite sure you don’t care for him yet,” replied Miss Donaldson anxiously, “if you can’t possibly be reconciled.”

“My deliberate choice is,” said Violet, “to be saved, any way, from knowing him any more.”

“I am afraid that is not indifference,” said Miss Donaldson, rising to go.

“It is certainly not affection,” replied Violet.

“You will have to please yourself, after all, though it is but a sad affair at best; but can I be any help or comfort to you at all? I wish your mother might be here to be with you.”

“I want no help, thank you, none at all,” answered Violet.

“Can I do nothing for you that you would like?”

“Nothing; I have all I want, Lucy attends to me.”

So Miss Donaldson went away, her kind intentions frustrated, and she herself awed and frightened at Violet’s composure.

Violet went back to her old position of tired despondency as soon as she was alone; she could make no effort just then but to endure quietly, to be silent till the great trial was over.

Lucy came in softly and looked at her with pity; she understood little of what had happened, only it seemed that her young mistress was being sacrificed either to somebody’s will or to somebody’s fancies. She went forward and gently touched Violet’s clasped hands as they lay on the table before her.

“Don’t take on so about it, Miss Letty,” she said sympathetically, “I dare say it will all look bright again soon.”

Violet lifted her head, and raised her sad eyes wistfully to her maid’s, as if glad of any

touch of kindred feeling and human tenderness.

“Thank you,” she said, and waited mutely for more.

“I don’t doubt you’ll be happy,” said Lucy again, “and of the two Mr. Alfred was always the pleasantest spoken and the nicest looking.”

Violet drew back her hands and turned from her.

“You can leave me now,” she said, with a kind of gentle patience; “I shall not go to bed to-night.”

Her manner, though so quiet, had too much decision in it for any appeal; Lucy departed and left her quite alone.

CHAPTER XI.

VIOLET'S BIRTHDAY.

VIOLET was married the next morning. She had dressed herself in white, without any ornament, but she looked much too pale and sad for a bride. She was quite calm, even courageous, and disturbed no one by hesitation or passionate distress. Before the wedding she had interviews with Alfred and with her guardian, and she overcame the opposition of both of them by her clearness and self-possession.

She saw Alfred first, and at her own request. He was still anxious to persuade her to marry Redfern and not himself; but she was unchangeable in her decision.

“If you won’t marry me,” she said, gazing at him with steadfast grey eyes, “I shall

have to marry Gerald, and I would sooner die."

So he gave way, only saying, "I hope you will some day forgive me for having done as you wished."

Then she asked him another favour, and that was that he would go away as soon as they were married, and leave her to herself for a few weeks.

"I will do just what you wish," he answered; "I was going away to-morrow with Redfern; I will go with him this afternoon."

"Thank you," she said; "I dare say in a little while I shall know how to be grateful to you; just now I can't."

"I will wait," he replied.

She was silent for a few moments, and then she looked at him with a kind of remorseful regret; "You have always been so kind to me," she said, "if you will only be patient, I know I shall like you again; I always liked you before; I do want somebody to love me, but at present—at present—oh! I can't think of you now."

"I don't ask you to do," he answered,

rising, as she turned her face from him ; “ trust me as much as you can—even to ask nothing from you that you are not ready to give.”

“ Yes, I do,” she said, in a low voice, “ or else it would be too hard for me.”

“ You know, Letty,” he went on hastily, “ I marry you to please yourself, and not me——”

“ Yes, I know,” she said, humbly and sadly.

“ But I will never come to you or claim you unless you want me ; you shall be as free afterwards as you are now.”

“ I ask too much from you,” she said suddenly ; “ you ought not to let me darken your life so.”

“ It is nothing,” he answered quickly, “ I should never have married ; and for myself I could ask nothing better than to be of any service to you. It is of you I think ; I only trust the day may never come when you will hate me for having done this.”

“ Do you think that is possible ?” she asked, turning her eyes wonderingly upon him.

“ I don’t see how you can help it,” he

answered ; “ however you may have liked me before.”

She waited a little before she spoke again. “ I think you are wrong,” she said earnestly ; “ I don’t think I ever shall.”

Then he left her, and Mr. Donaldson came ; there was very little to be said to him ; she only desired to be allowed to remain still in his house—she did not wish to go to her mother’s house, or back to Monkholme ; and of course he was willing that she should still be his sister’s guest.

Redfern and Gerald remained till after the ceremony ; by Violet’s own wish they were both present when she was married ; she said she was neither afraid nor ashamed of what she did, and would like all her friends to be there. When Mr. Donaldson suggested that Redfern’s presence might be painful both to her and to himself, she answered still, “ Let him come, I want him to be there. We are nothing now to one another but cousins and friends ; do you think that we have quarrelled, or that I am afraid of seeing him ?”

She looked at him bravely as she spoke, as if she would still have defied the world for

his sake and her own, and contradicted by her conduct all the interpretation it would put on their past actions.

So Redfern was present at the marriage, which took place in the drawing-room. He was obedient to her wish in this last moment, and would have obeyed her then, whatever hard thing she had asked of him. He kept in the background, however, and she never even turned her eyes his way ; but they were each conscious of the other's presence, and hardly of anything else. It was their last hour together ; they were still so near, and yet for ever separated ; looks and speech were henceforth denied to them ; all through the brief ceremony—which seemed dream-like and unreal, so that she went through it indifferently, as if it did not really concern her at all — Violet was aware of the slight, dark figure that stood a little in the shadow, with a quiet face and very hopeless eyes ; and Redfern heard her voice, and saw the white gleam of her dress, but he saw it with the calmness and gloomy indifference of complete isolation and despair. Two days of madness seemed too brief a period to part those who

had been so long united in such a close affection, yet it already looked a long time since they had smiled on one another with happy eyes, and each turned to listen earnestly to whatever the other said.

Alfred had loved Violet nearly all her life, yet of all those present at this strange wedding, it was he who most earnestly wished that it had not needed to take place. Violet was sustained by a sense of escape, she was strong with the feeling of action and resolve ; she knew she was putting Redfern entirely out of her life, and making herself safe for ever from his love and his unkindness. Redfern too, in a kind of bitter despair, rejoiced that she was saved from a life with him, and from the cruelty of his affection : but the bridegroom himself knew that he was being placed as an insuperable barrier between Violet and what she cared for most ; he knew that he was helping her to make her loss irretrievable, and to convert a passing trouble into a life-long regret.

He went through his part firmly, however ; he knew that at least it would give him the right to take care of Violet always, and

let her suffer from no unkindness or injustice.

When the wedding was over every one came forward and shook hands with the bride, except Alfred and Redfern. Violet received these salutations passively, but when Redfern came forward, rather slowly and doubtfully, and put out his hand also, she shrank back and turned from him trembling.

Redfern went away without a word. This was only the last bitter drop of a very full cup ; he had longed despairingly for a little sign of forgiveness before they parted ; he had thought that, protected by the presence of the others, she might have granted it to him ; but it seemed that she could not bear even to touch his hand again. He told himself, with bitter self-scorn, that it was better so, and that he was very well content.

Alfred alone of them all did not offer any attention to his own wife ; he stood aloof from the rest, comprehending that the trust which had given him every right, shut him out effectually from demanding the smallest one. The bitter part of his situation was, that while she might have received his af-

fection gratefully without this last close tie, she must now shrink from it as a reminder or a claim.

So she left the room without having spoken to either of the two men who were the dearest to her, her husband, and he who had so lately been her lover.

She did not notice, when she returned to her own sitting-room, that the letter had gone from the table; she had even forgotten its existence, though she had written it so few hours before: but that action had belonged to another life, which had fallen away from her into a dreary blackness almost out of sight and memory, as a great stone falls suddenly and quickly over a precipice and is lost at once in the darkness below. Life sometimes goes for a great distance over a level plain, where it takes a long walk to change the aspect of the things about us, but there exist in it these great and sudden breaks, and the ideas of a life-time slip suddenly from us, and disappear at once and for ever.

The letter had gone, however, for Lucy had found it there, and had held it meditatively

in her fingers for some time, wondering what ought to be done with it. It was left there, sealed, and addressed to Mr. Hilborough, and she fancied therefore that her mistress meant it to be given to him. Violet had not mentioned it to her, but Lucy imagined that might be because she disliked giving directions about it ; she thought she would save Mrs. Hilborough the painful necessity of asking her maid to take it, because it was probably a farewell letter, which Mr. Alfred ought not to see, so she took it and delivered it quietly to Redfern when she met him in the hall.

Redfern received it with a flush of surprise, and crumpled it up in his hand till he was alone. It was with a horrible feeling of remorse that he read the lines it contained. He saw at once that it had been written the day before, and had not been meant for him to see now. The words “I don’t change or get tired so easily as you do,” struck deep into his heart like the unconscious reproach of one who has trusted us utterly and been deceived. At that minute, when he thought of Violet’s unceasing tenderness and faith,

life was to him a more dreadful thing than it ever had been before or was after. He was in the position of a man who hates with a deadly hatred, and is forced to a life-long companionship with what he abhors: for the man he hated was himself, and he alone was the bitter enemy who had destroyed his own happiness, and worst of all, turned Violet's love into misery and regret.

He was still standing with the letter in his hand when Alfred came in.

He turned to him at once, and held the paper out; it was all crumpled together between his fingers.

“Look here,” he said in a low, agitated voice, “this is a letter from Violet—from your wife,” he spoke that word with a bitter emphasis: “she wrote it yesterday, before she knew what was going to happen; I don’t think she meant me to see it now.”

“I don’t know,” said Alfred, quietly, “I saw it on her table this morning.”

“Her maid gave it me, by some mistake; but now I have got it I see what I was mad ever to forget—what *she* is, and what I always was. I want to see her once more—

I shall never have another chance, don't think I am vile enough to wish for one—but I want just to ask her to forgive my wickedness, I want her to know how much I hate myself; she has never spoken a single word to me since yesterday afternoon. Will you let me see her?"

"I think it is unwise of you to ask it," replied Alfred coldly, "but she will please herself in that, as in everything; she does nothing that is not right."

"She does not care for me now," answered Redfern quickly, "or I would not ask it; she sees at last what I am. I am selfish, I know; but I want one friendly word before I leave her to you for ever."

"She will please herself," Alfred said again, and left Redfern alone.

Redfern wandered uneasily out, across the hall, and down the long passages, and it chanced that he met Violet on the way to her room.

"Violet!" he said, hastily coming forward, "let me speak to you for one minute. I have got your letter."

"What letter?" she asked, standing gazing

at him with shining eyes, like an animal at bay.

“The letter you wrote yesterday,” he went on quickly, as if he feared she would go; “if I had known you thought of me so kindly, I would—I hope you don’t think I was insane enough to let you go, knowing you were ready to forgive me.”

Violet gazed at him still; her colour came and went, and her breast heaved with indignation.

“I am Alfred Hilborough’s wife,” she said, “how dare you speak to me so?”

“I want you to say you will forgive me; only give me one little word of kindness to remember in the life I am going away to. I don’t make any mistake; I know that I am nothing to you now, I am quite aware how much you despise and dislike me; you can afford then to give me your forgiveness; I never asked for any farewell.”

“Forgiveness!” she repeated, with sudden bitterness, “I pray with all my heart that I never may forgive you.”

Redfern looked at her in surprise; he had never known the passion of her nature before,

but only its tenderness. He was startled, and answered nothing. There was a step behind them in the passage ; it turned and retreated again, but Violet spoke suddenly and passionately.

“ Alfred !” she said, “ don’t go. Come to me, here.”

He came at once, and she took his arm and clung to him.

“ Why do you leave me to him ?” she asked, “ why do you not save me from ever seeing or hearing him ? It was for that that I married you.”

“ I will go,” said Redfern hoarsely, “ you shall not need to be saved.”

She looked at him again, and drew a deep breath ; then she spoke solemnly.

“ You asked me to say a kind word : I hope I shall never even think one. The thing I wish for most is to go on disliking you always ; I hope I shall learn to hate you soon—I shall try with all my will, to do it.”

“ That is enough,” said Redfern ; “ I have got my answer,” and he turned and went.

Violet’s hand dropped at once from her

husband's arm ; she turned away from him indifferently.

"Are not you needlessly cruel both to yourself and him ?" he asked in a low voice.

She looked at him with hard bright eyes. "What would you have me do ?" she said. "I have tried loving long enough ; what is the use of it ? it only makes every one miserable. I will try hating now ; it seems safer ;" and with a miserable little laugh she turned into her own room and closed the door.

Alfred went into the library to seek Redfern. It was curious that these two men felt no bitterness towards each other, though each was the only obstacle in the way of the other's happiness ; but the Hilborough nature was intensely just, except towards those most passionately loved, and so they could meet without any feeling of enmity.

Redfern stood by the window looking gloomily out. A woman may sob away her grief in bitter tears ; there is nothing a man can do to express his, except to abuse somebody, and Redfern wished only to abuse himself ; but his nature was a silent one, and the great griefs of his life had been mostly

unspoken, so he stood quietly, enduring the first bitter hours of the many in store for him.

Alfred went and put his hand on his shoulder kindly.

“Don’t mind about it so much, Ref,” he said ; “she does not mean all she said, and she will mean it still less to-morrow.”

“I wonder that you, of all men in the world, can care to be civil to me,” replied Redfern moodily.

“Oh,” said Alfred, “it’s habit, I dare say ; I have got used to liking you, and don’t enjoy seeing you so miserable. You have behaved badly, I know,” he added in a low voice, “but you are punished enough without my interference.”

He went to look for a railway guide, and came back with one in his hand.

“Look here, Ref,” he said, as he turned over the leaves, “I know what a good fellow you are really—much better than I am—and besides that, Violet always thought so well of you, and that goes a long way with me ; she will forgive you some day, and then we can all be friends once more ; in the meantime, I, for one, don’t throw you over.”

“ You are much too good to me,” answered Redfern.

After that they talked solely about the trains, and arranged the time of their departure. Alfred was going to ride to the station, but Redfern expressed his intention of starting first and walking there. It was a long way, but any kind of action was a relief to him just then, and he could have welcomed weariness and bodily pain as a happy change.

Gerald had already gone, and the house seemed very quiet, for Violet remained in her own room.

Redfern said good-bye to his host and hostess, and set out alone, without any farewell from the woman he loved so much.

It might be that he was tired and indifferent, or that he thought no one watched his departure and cared to observe his appearance, but certainly as he walked down the drive his lameness was more evident than ever, and he seemed to move with hopeless dejection and heedlessness; all the youth and brightness had gone from his look and manners.

But some one watched him alone from a

window above, with eyes that ached with unshed tears, and with a longing unspeakable that she might have died rather than needed to send him away so desolate and unheeded.

Alfred lingered almost till the last moment, hoping that Violet would send for him, or take some notice of his departure. Her door remained closed however; no message came to him from her, and he was obliged to send a request to be allowed to see her.

“Certainly, if he wished it,” was the answer brought to him, and he went to her in her own sitting-room.

She was sitting at the window when he went in, hidden behind the curtain from the view of any one outside; she did not rise to meet him, she just turned her head, and then looked back again with dreary indifference down the drive where Redfern had walked alone. Her face was hard and hopeless; there was no need of courage for action any longer now; she had reached the bitterness of the despair afterwards.

“I am going away, Letty,” said Alfred, standing at a little distance from her.

“Are you?” she answered coldly, without looking round.

“I have come to say good-bye,” he went on, more urgently, impatient of her inattention.

“Have you?” she said again, indifferently; “are good-byes necessary? People seem to do very well without them.”

He was silent, for he was hurt by her coldness; she seemed to follow out her own thoughts without heeding him.

Suddenly she turned round and spoke to him: “Do you know why I am sitting here?” she asked.

“I wish to know nothing that you don’t care to tell me,” he replied.

“I will tell you,” she said, fixing her eyes upon him; “I have been watching Redfern Hilborough go away.”

“Very well,” said Alfred quickly; “I have nothing to say in answer.”

She looked at him with earnest inquiry, and the look in her face changed as she turned it from him.

“I am glad I have told you,” she said, in a low voice; “I felt so wicked before.”

“Violet! what can I say to you?” he answered earnestly, but she did not heed him.

“It has come true,” she said, “what you told me; I think I hate everybody in the world. I hate him, and I hate you, but I hate myself most of all.”

He was completely silent; he did not know her in this mood, and could not answer her.

“Oh, it is hard!” she said, with a bitter cry; “life seemed so easy before, and I meant to love every one, and I tried to do right. Now it is all wrong; there is only safety in hatred, and I am wicked, and I dare not be anything else. Why does God let it be so? I wanted to be kind to every one, and I must hate them all. God is cruel; he might have let me die.”

She put her face down on her hands, and was silent. It was dreadful to Alfred that he might not go to her and comfort her with caresses and tender words; but even his love was turned to bitterness for her; he was obliged to see her trembling in lonely anguish and he could not give her any loving touch,

and hardly dared even to speak a word to her.

She lifted her head, and turned her tearless eyes on him.

“I did not want to be wicked,” she said ; “I meant so to be good ; and this is the end of it all.”

“Not the end, dear ; trust me, you will be happier soon.”

She looked at him attentively, as if she tried to listen, and could not follow his meaning because of her own absorbing thoughts.

“I have spoilt his life too,” she said, “and I wished so much to make him happier ; I may go on hating him always—he is hard, he is cruel, he never loved me—but I *can’t* wish him to be miserable.”

She looked at Alfred as if she expected him to reproach her.

“I don’t want you to do, Letty,” he said, going nearer to her ; “I want you to do nothing but to be happy.”

“You are very good,” she said indifferently. She seemed to fall back into her own thoughts, but his waiting there recalled her again.

“Oh,” she said suddenly, “I am not

grateful to you, I know ; but you must wait ; I will try to behave better soon ; now I can't do it."

" I don't wish you to do it," he said again ; " only trust me a little, and I will wait for the rest."

" Have I not trusted you ?" she answered.

" Yes, you have, and at your request I am going away now ; I shall not come again till you are ready to see me ; but I may write to you ?"

" If you like," she replied, without any appearance of interest ; then she added, abruptly, " Redfern has gone already."

" Yes, he was walking ; I am going to ride," said Alfred, trying patiently to recall her thoughts to himself.

" I don't know if it seems odd to you," she went on, gazing drearily through the window, and with a curious kind of indifference in her voice, " but I saw him go away without one look or one word ; we never even said ' good-afternoon ;' I watched him go down that drive and turn the corner round the big holly ; I dare say it is really natural, but it seemed curious to me to see him go so. I

shall never see him again, I suppose ; I don't *want* to see him again, of course."

"Letty, Letty," said Alfred earnestly, "don't think of him any more. Remember that I love you with all my heart, and you are still so young that you may forget the past yet. I want more than all things to help and comfort you."

He longed to take her in his arms and to kiss her quiet, hopeless face, until her grief could be softened into tears, but she listened to him quite passively, and he dared not touch her.

"You are very kind to me," she said ; "you always are."

"Letty, I am going ; I ought to have gone before ; dear Letty, my own dearest, I have loved you so long, have you nothing to say to me ?" he asked.

"What can I say ?" she inquired ; "I loved Redfern yesterday, to-day I hate him ; but I can't love you yet, it is too soon."

"We loved each other so much once," he persisted earnestly.

"Yes," she assented, "that was when we were children ; that was a long time ago."

With an effort he recovered his calmness.

"I will not trouble you any more," he said, "I will go. Good-bye."

She said "Good-bye," and did not even turn her eyes to him.

"Letty, won't you? I am going. Even Gerald had a better farewell."

He put out his hand entreatingly, but she shrank from him, and clasped her hands together trembling, holding them out of his reach.

"But Redfern," she said, "had no farewell at all."

She looked at him quite calmly as she spoke it. He said no other word; there was great disappointment in his face; he turned and left her with a darkened look, and she awoke from her absorbing thoughts to see it. A great thrill of remorse filled her heart then, but she was quite silent; it was still impossible to touch his hand after watching Redfern go away without a single look. She waited until the door was closed behind him, then she let her head fall and sobbed passionately, feeling only that this last in-

gratitude was another reason to think bitterly of Redfern—Redfern whom she had so lately loved, who still stood between her and the husband who loved her truly.

PART IV.

WHAT WAS LEFT.

The rest is lost. I do but stand and think.
Across the waters of a troubled life
This Flower of Heaven so vainly overhangs,
What perfect counterpart would be in sight
If tanks were clearer. Let us clean the tubes,
And wait for rains. -

MRS. E. B. BROWNING.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST MEETING.

So Violet Hilborough was left in Scotland. Her life at first seemed little changed ; there was hardly anything to mark her new position except the gold ring on her finger that she never might take off again, and the fact that she was called Mrs. instead of Miss Hilborough. That hurt her a little at first ; it was an old idea with a new meaning to it ; for it was not as Alfred's wife that she had expected to claim that name. She begged her host and hostess to call her Violet, and so escaped hearing her new title from their lips ; but she had to bear it from the servants, and after a short time she got accustomed to it, as to other strange things.

Her mother wrote to ask her to go to her

for a short time, but Violet could not bear to go ; she had paid for the happiness of those at home at such a sacrifice, that she shrank from all intercourse with them, and shunned and dreaded the evidence of an affection which had cost her so much.

Mrs. Hilborough was disturbed by the sudden change in her daughter's prospects, and anxious about her state of mind, but Violet sought no sympathy from her now ; Violet remembered too distinctly that her mother had always seen Redfern's faults, and prophesied disappointment for herself, and she could have given her confidence to almost any of her friends rather than to her. She still resented the premature recognition of a fact that had been so dreadfully forced upon her own mind ; she blamed Redfern continually herself, but she could yet bear no blame of him from any one else.

So she stayed in Scotland, and the spring brightened and deepened into summer, just like any other spring, but no summer before had ever found her so lonely and unhappy. There was not one person in the world to whom she could speak from her sad heart,

and to whose tenderness she could turn for any comfort. Her life seemed just the same as before : there was only the great blank of Redfern's departure and silence that changed it ; from day to day and from week to week, she went on without hearing a word of or from him, and she knew that it must go on so all her life, and that she must wish for nothing else.

Hitherto every action of her daily life had been connected with him by some thought ; those about her had referred to him continually, and anything affecting his interests had been told first to her as to one whom it chiefly concerned. Now it was nothing to her whatever loss or joy came to him ; no one could tell it ; their lives went on in the same world with this dreadful wall of silence between them.

His daily letters came no more, and that was the greatest present loss to her. The words that he had spoken to her across the distance that divided them, which had linked her existence to his, were spoken no more, and never could be spoken again.

She wondered mutely what was befalling

him ; she could not help longing just to speak one word that he might hear, and so assure herself of their existence in the same world ; but the longing could only be repeated hopelessly, until she was tired of feeling it, for every new minute of those hours and days only brought the same old want, with nothing to change it for her.

Sometimes she thought passionately, “ If only I might hear him speak one word to me—anything—it would be easier for a little while after ;” and sometimes she thought of those about her, “ Oh, they are cruel, cruel, never to tell me anything of him, as if he or I were dead, or I could give up caring for his life all at once like this ;” but oftener she was angry with herself for thinking of him at all ; she always judged him bitterly, and she never wished that she had forgiven him or could forgive him still. Her heart was hardened against that desire ; the remembrance that he had known she loved him and had left her unclaimed, stood yet between her and all gentle thoughts of him, but the habit of musing upon him and being interested in his lot could not leave her at once.

Meanwhile other letters came to her instead of his. Alfred wrote to her every day. At first she could hardly bear to open his letters ; they came to her not a week after the time when she had been in the habit of receiving Redfern's. Those true and tender words of his had used to make her feel strong and happy—they were a charm to keep off evil fancies for many an hour ; but Alfred's letters brought no joy to her.

She often sat listlessly with her husband's letter unopened on her knee, and gazed before her long without caring to read it. She almost disliked Alfred for having the right to address her when Redfern could not, and occasionally she felt a wicked desire to tear up the harmless sentences and save herself from having read them.

They never contained anything to wound or vex her : Alfred wrote kindly always, but briefly, as if to let her know that he was ready to help her at need, but would not force himself on her life until she desired it ; his letters, however, were always signed, "Your affectionate husband, Alfred Hildborough." The first time Violet read that

signature, she laughed a little, which seemed strange ; but she laughed now at many things that would once have made her sad or angry.

After a little time, however, the letters which she had received so indifferently at first became the chief interest of every day. She had nothing else to look forward to, and nothing that she saw in Scotland really had any part in her own life.

Sometimes she even thought with a little gratitude of Alfred's patient kindness, and remembered with regret the affection existing between them in former times ; but the recollection of the great new tie that bound her to her husband always came back to her with a kind of horror, and made her think of Redfern, and remember that, however she consoled herself, he must be henceforth alone.

Thus it was that the knowledge of the injustice which Redfern caused her to do to her husband embittered her against her lover and shut her heart to forgiveness of him ; while the thought that all tenderness given to Alfred was taken from Redfern, whose it should have been, made her shrink

from her husband almost with dislike, and obliged her to withhold from him even the affection she had given easily and frankly before.

Yet, as the days went on, and no voice said to her “I love you,” nor any tender actions made the words unnecessary, Violet began to long for any kind of affection to belong to her.

Her nature was not self-reliant ; all the courage and strength of her character belonged to its tenderness ; for herself alone she had but little, and she soon grew helpless and weary. Besides, she had all her life been accustomed to have her daily habits moulded by the requirements of affection ; she did not know how to exist for her own convenience only. She was accustomed to make it always her aim to please those whom she cared for ; when there were none to please, there seemed no longer any object in action or any use in existence. She began to wish to see Alfred and talk to him a little ; she had seen no look in any eyes since he left her like that he had given her as they spoke together ; she wanted such a

look of assurance that she was still very dear to some human heart. She dreaded his speech, but his silent love she began to long for, and she knew that he could be silent and very patient. Therefore, when Mr. Donaldson spoke to her very seriously, and asked her to consider if she ought not to let her husband come and see her before long, she answered quietly that she was ready to do so, and wrote herself to Alfred to ask him to come.

It was rather an odd letter, being only this :

“ DEAR ALFRED,

“ Mr. Donaldson wishes me to invite you to spend a day here, as soon as you find it convenient.

“ I shall also be very glad to see you, if you will not expect me to be too glad.

“ Yours gratefully,

“ VIOLET HILBOROUGH.”

In her short notes to him she always signed herself so, and it hurt Alfred every time to see that she grudged him the true word “ wife.”

He answered her summons, and came one day in the late spring.

Violet had thought of him with something that was almost tenderness in the days before he came, but as the time of his arrival drew near, that feeling all left her, and she became so cold and quiet that Mr. Donaldson was afraid he had been wrong in advising her to see her husband so soon.

Alfred came ; Violet had nervously begged that she might not be allowed to meet him alone, and so her guardian and his sister were in the room when he entered. He spoke to them first, as they seemed to expect, but his eye sought his wife, where she waited in the background, silent and still.

When he escaped from them and went to her, he was startled to see how white was her face and dreary the look in her eyes ; and the hand she allowed him to take was so cold and passive that he could find no words to speak to her. He turned from her again and went back to talk to the others instead, with a feeling of blank and chilly disappointment.

He attempted no conversation with her ;

the least cruel thing he could do just then seemed to be to leave her to herself. Every one ignored her presence as much as possible, to give her time to recover her self-possession.

When they all went in to dinner, Alfred offered her his arm : her fingers trembled as they lightly touched it ; she did not turn her eyes towards him, but walked beside him with her cold, quiet gaze steadfastly fixed before her. They uttered no word as they went. Alfred had never before understood how much she, who had given her affection readily, could shrink from bestowing on him any other sort of love. It had seemed that the quick sympathy and kindness she had lavished on him before might readily deepen into nearer tenderness, but now he comprehended that the old friendship hardly helped him at all ; Redfern had held such a place in her heart, that beside him all other men were counted equal, for smaller distinctions were completely lost sight of.

Alfred rarely lost his self-possession in any circumstances, however difficult ; so he was able to talk to his host and hostess over

dinner, while Violet sat silent, and no one liked to address her. He was absorbed, for all that, in an idea that he was in the wrong place, and ought not to have come. The situation was oppressive to him; it would have relieved him to be able to get up and go away again without another word, because it was an unnatural thing to him to be persecuting Violet with a presence that so evidently disturbed her; but he sat patiently through the dinner, and managed to keep up with the desultory conversation that went on. If he answered rather slowly, that seemed only according to his somewhat sleepy nature, which never hurried itself at all.

At last it was over. Alfred opened the door for the ladies to go out, and sat down again; the conversation immediately ceased; he and his host fell at once into thoughtful silence.

“I am afraid I have made a mistake,” said Alfred, after a few moments, as he pushed his glass from him; “I had better not have come.”

“I don’t know,” answered Mr. Donaldson;

“there had to be a first time, of course, and she did not seem unwilling to send for you.”

“No,” said Alfred, “I had expected quite a different meeting; I did not hope for a real welcome, but I thought I should find something like her old pleasant manner. I never saw her like this before.”

“It is hard for her to realize her position just at first,” answered Mr. Donaldson; “she will get over the shock of it all in a little time. I dare say she will recover herself before you go.”

“I shall be afraid of coming again,” said Alfred, “for how can I torture her like this?”

“She won’t feel it so much another time; and the only chance for you both is that you may be drawn nearer together. The case is hopeless for her, as well as for you, while you are parted.”

Nothing more was said by them before they got up and went into the drawing-room.

Violet was sitting alone by the window. She had chosen that seat purposely before

their entrance, leaving Miss Donaldson alone at the other end of the room. Her look was quite changed, her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes unusually bright ; she had roused herself to make a great effort.

She glanced at Alfred as he came in ; he hesitated, but, when she looked again, he crossed the room and stood before her.

There was a vacant space on the couch beside her ; she moved her dress a little to make it wider, and said, while her cheeks burned painfully, “ There is room here, if you like to sit down.”

He took the place immediately ; she shrank a little further away from him for one moment, but the next she recovered herself and moved back into her former position.

“ I am afraid I have behaved very wrongly,” she said quickly ; “ I will try to do better another time.”

“ I hope you won’t find it so hard to bear another time,” he answered.

She said no more ; she sat passively beside him, with her hands lying idle on her knee ;

her face was still hot and her eyes shining, but her look was wistful and far away.

Alfred said and did nothing. He felt at that moment a stranger to her; yet it grieved him very much to notice her passive despair, which any tenderness of his could only increase.

“If you will talk to me,” she said at length, speaking in a subdued voice, “I shall listen to you, but it is difficult for me to say anything now.”

He was always loyal to her wishes, and at once he roused himself to tell her all the light and indifferent incidents that might interest her. It was evident that she made an effort to follow all he said; she answered briefly at times, and asked questions to convince him that she was attending.

“Tell me about yourself,” she said once; “I like to know all that happens to you.”

So he related everything he could think of; but, though she answered sometimes, she rarely glanced at him at all, until he ceased to talk, and they both fell into a complete silence.

His elbow rested on the arm of the couch,

and he had turned so that he could watch her face ; she knew that he did so, but seemed indifferent to that as to everything else ; the look in her eyes was still absent and unobserving, and the attitude of her head, the listlessness of her hands, spoke of utter dreariness and want of interest in life.

Alfred looked at her sadly ; he noticed the soft round outlines of her face, with the bright bloom in her cheeks, and the feverish brilliancy of her eyes ; and he fell into a dream of comforting her, and found it very hard not to draw her to him with the arm so near her, and rest that flushed and hopeless face on his shoulder, while he clasped the listless hands in his.

He made no movement, however, even to attract her attention, and Violet too fell into a dream, but hers was one of effort and not of hope. She turned to him at length and said quietly, “ If you like to go into the garden, I will go with you.”

He was surprised and pleased, but she did not seem to guess it ; she had ceased to be afraid of him, and she wanted to speak to him alone. His patience, which was not

indifference, and his consideration, which could not be mistaken for coldness, already reassured her, and began to bring back the sense of comfort and security which she had used to have in his presence.

They went out into the garden, but did not walk there long ; Violet sat down almost immediately on a garden seat, and Alfred took the place beside her. Then she waited mutely ; she wanted to speak to him of her own life and his, but delayed that he might begin instead, and perhaps make it easier for her to say something.

Then it was that Alfred did the first thing that began to recall her estranged affection to him. He broke the silence to say briefly, and without looking at her, “ I saw Redfern a few weeks ago.”

She was startled ; she had least expected such information at that moment, and from him ; her heart beat and she turned towards him with an excited face, while her eyes asked the question her lips did not utter.

“ He looked much as he always does,” he answered, just glancing at her and away again, as if he would not see how she looked

at that minute ; “ only he was very quiet. He asked me about you.”

She turned away with a quivering lip. “ Thank you,” she said, quite passionately ; then her voice broke into a sob, and she put her face down on the iron arm of the garden chair and wept bitterly, yet with a sense of relief.

Alfred looked at her then with love all the more strongly felt because he might not express it ; he put his arm lightly round her neck, with his hand on her shoulder, and then was still again.

“ I thought you would like to know,” he said simply.

She did not shrink from his touch, she even raised her head and moved as if she would have rested it on his arm instead of against the hard iron ; but some recollection checked her, and she put it down again.

“ You are very good to me,” she said, in a whisper that he had to stoop nearer to her to hear ; “ I shall love you again soon, I know I shall, if you will wait.”

“ I shall be very happy in waiting,” he answered, “ if I can be any comfort to you.”

“I think you are, already,” she said.

She did not move until she had recovered her calmness, then she raised her head, and he took his arm away.

“Do you know,” she said, in a low voice, “I am more wicked than you think. To-day when you came I disliked you more than I could tell.”

“But you do not now?”

“No; and that is only because you are so very patient, and ask me to do nothing that I don’t choose.”

There was a pause after that, in which Violet was musing deeply.

“Do you know,” she began suddenly, “I never thought people could become so wicked when they had always wanted to be good.”

“To be unhappy is not wicked,” answered Alfred.

“I can’t tell you how I feel,” she went on, without noticing what he said; “I am quite changed in all my mind; I am not the Violet you think you love; if you could see into my heart now, even you would reproach me and be horrified.”

He put his hand on hers for his answer, but she drew it away quickly.

“Don’t,” she said, “or I can’t go on.”

“All my feelings are quite altered,” she continued, after a minute or two; “I have no kindly thoughts of any one, but a sort of hatred—all over me, as if people had all wounded me, and were laughing. It is silly, of course.”

“Do I laugh?” he asked.

“No,” she said, “and so I hate myself too; but it is curious to feel so changed; it was always so pleasant to like everybody and to try to please them. It is Redfern who has done it all,” she added abruptly.

“If only you could put Redfern out of your mind it would be better,” said Alfred.

“If I could! yes,” she answered. “At least I hate him. I feel hard and quite cruel when I think of him, but he comes between me and everything else—even between me and God,” she went on in a low voice: “when I try to pray, I can’t begin; some one seems to say instead, ‘I am Redfern, and you hate me,’ and I can’t get past that thought. I don’t think I *want* to get through it to God.”

“ You will, before long,” said Alfred.

“ Yes,” said Violet ; “ of course you think it will comfort me to say so.”

“ Can you not forgive him, Letty ?”

“ No,” she said, “ I never wish to do. It is not only that : I feel as if I could not forgive anybody. That is dreadful, is it not ? You never thought I was wicked, like that. Nor did I, before.”

She spoke drearily, but without excitement.

“ It is very curious ; I always wanted to make everybody happy until now. I don’t think I should have cared for Redfern so much if he had been happier ; but it seemed that I could give him so many pleasant things, and he needed them so much, and there was nothing exactly that he could give me, so I liked him all the better. If he had been like you, quite prosperous and happy, I should not have cared, but as it was—oh, it was hard, it was dreadful ! I had not asked that my own life should be easy, but that I might make his so.”

“ You were always kind, dear ; and you will feel so again.”

“ No, it is better not to care for any one ;

it is less wrong in the end ; if I had not loved him I should not have needed to dislike everybody now. And it seems it was true what he always told me, and he was wicked and cruel after all."

She paused for a moment, and went on more passionately. "Since it was true, he should never have said so. He should have told a lie and let me believe it. What did it matter ? If only I never need have known that he was not good and kind ! What did I care for the rest ?"

She was silent for a moment ; then she spoke in a different tone.

"It is kind of me to tell this to you, of all persons in the world," she said.

"It is better to tell it to me than to any one else, or even than to keep it to yourself, I think," answered Alfred.

"You are very patient with me," she said, in a tired voice, all the excitement having suddenly left her ; "I hope I shall be better to you soon."

"If you could love me only a little," he replied, "that would help you to forget Redfern more than anything else."

“I will try,” she said ; “I should like to be grateful. Come and see me again, if I don’t vex you too much.”

“May I come in a month ?”

“Yes,” she said ; “it does me good to talk to you ; it makes me wicked never to speak, and to know that every one thinks I am all right and good.”

“Then I am glad I came, after all.”

“Were you sorry ?” she asked, looking at him rather wistfully ; “I wish I did not feel such a long way off you ; but it seems as if you could not reach to touch me—or anybody else. I am quite alone ; perhaps that is the punishment of the wicked, not to be able to feel anybody, however near they are—to be quite dead to any love and help.”

“You feel mine a little after all, don’t you ?” he asked.

“I am not sure. I should like you to come again, certainly. I am so very lonely. And I like your letters ; write every day to me ; don’t cease forgiving me, if you can help it.”

“I always love you, which is more.”

“I know it is,” she answered, and then she said no more.

They went back to the house, and when they reached the presence of others, Violet soon fell back into her sad and listless manner. Her mind had been only momentarily roused from the hopeless indifference in which she lived. She did not seem to notice Alfred's departure very much, although she again said he must come soon. She resigned her hand listlessly to his grasp, which lingered while he looked at her tenderly and longingly ; there was nothing yielding or comprehending in her attitude, however ; he had half-hoped that she might let him kiss her once before he went, but she stood before him rigid and calm, her cold fingers passive in his, and so he said farewell and left her again.

But he did not go without hope, and even Violet's life was a little changed by his coming ; it was still more changed by the fact that she could bear to expect his return, and even to look forward to it, as a thing she need not turn her mind from, and did not forget in a blank despair of utter indifference.

CHAPTER II.

“THEIR SWORD SHALL PIERCE THEIR OWN
HEARTS.”

THE time came for Alfred to visit Violet again. He went very hopefully, for her last letters to him had been kind and cheerful too ; she seemed to be looking forward to the meeting, without any dread of it.

She expected his coming, and received him alone. When he entered the room where she was waiting, she went forward quickly to meet him. She was no longer reluctant to see him, and there was no look of shyness or doubt in her face ; on the contrary, she put her hand unhesitatingly into his. There was an appearance of suppressed excitement about her, and she looked at him with earnest and interested eyes.

“I am glad you have come,” she said.

He did not know what to answer her, because he did not understand her at all, and he could not be as pleased to hear her welcome as if it had seemed to be meant for him ; yet she had apparently waited for him eagerly.

She sat down on a chair near, and he followed her example. She seemed embarrassed now by no self-consciousness.

“I have wanted you to come very much,” she said again.

“You should have sent for me to come before,” he answered.

“No,” she said, “I did not want you before. You do not understand.”

She paused for a moment, and then she turned her eyes full upon him, and asked : “Have you heard from Redfern Hildborough ?”

He was startled and surprised.

“Not since last week,” he answered.

“I heard yesterday.”

Alfred’s face flushed.

“He has written to you,” he said quickly ; “he has ventured to trouble you now.”

“No,” said Violet, “it is his mother. Redfern says nothing.”

She uttered the last words slowly in a low voice, as if she said them to herself only.

Alfred got up impatiently.

“As you said, I don’t understand. What *can* his mother have to say to you? What right has she to disturb you at all?”

“You will see; here is the letter; it came yesterday morning when I was only thinking about you. Since then I have waited for you to come.”

He took it from her fingers, and turned it over in his.

“Do you wish me to read it?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered, “I could not tell you.”

He read it then, or rather, he glanced hastily through it. It began,

“DEAR VIOLET,”

“I can’t go on like this any more and not let you know. Redfern has been ill for a week now, and I am not to say anything for fear of vexing you. What we have to go through does not matter; only *you* are not to be vexed; at least,

he seems to think so. Now he is worse; he has not known me for three days; he can't tell me any more not to send, so it is right for you to hear. I don't see why you are to have all the happiness to yourself, and not even to know of anything else. You have got all you want now. You took Redfern when it suited you, and to satisfy old Mr. Hilborough; and when you could please yourself entirely, you threw him over; and now you have got the money, and the lands, and the husband you like best too, I suppose, and my poor boy has nothing.

“We did very well till he began to go to Monkholme, and now everything has gone wrong. I can't see that it was my fault if I did spend a little more money lately than I used to do. I thought he would have plenty when he married you, and it was hard if I must be grudged a few extra things for my children; but then, when he found it out, after he came from Scotland, he said there was nothing to pay with, and so he insisted on working hard at copying and things, and taking no rest, and never going out. That made it worse for him, though he never com-

plained ; it would have been better if he had ; it often made me cross to see him going on and saying nothing, except to be angry if any one spoke a word against you—and if I, who am his mother, had not a right to do that, I wonder who had.

“ I told him he would be ill, and he only said that mattered to nobody now, for he never thinks of his mother. I never could please him ; he only thought about you, and this is the end of it : he has come back to me after all. It’s little I can do for him, for he never cared to get better, and now he will die, and no one thinks of me and the little ones. You don’t care ; you have got what you want, but I can’t bear that you should not know.

“ It is not that I want anything from you ; you have got nothing that is any good to us. The little girls ask why you don’t come and make Ref better if he wants you ; but there’s nothing you can do now, only you ought to know what you have done. If he dies I shall always feel that you have killed him ; you took him away from us all only just to do that, for you made him not care to live,

and now he will die. All the years I have nursed and taken care of him count for nothing against any words that you choose to say, and yet you have forgotten already, and married Alfred Hilborough.

“I suppose you are happy ; you have got another husband, but Redfern is dying, and who will give me another son ?

“E. HILBOROUGH.”

Alfred crushed the letter impatiently in his fingers and glanced at Violet.

“This ought never to have been sent to you,” he said.

“Yes,” answered Violet, in a low voice ; “I must not be troubled ; that is what Mr. Donaldson says—and you all. No one thinks of *him*.”

“She had no right to send to you,” Alfred repeated ; “they have no claim on you at all now. If she had written to me, there would have been some sense in it ; but to reproach you—it is shocking !”

“I think not,” said Violet, with shining eyes ; “if I had been his mother I would have said more.”

Alfred stopped and looked at her.

“Yes,” she continued; “I have taken care of my own friends; they have all they want; I never thought of *his*.”

“That was not your affair at all,” he said; “you had enough to think of.”

“It is all me,” she answered quickly; “you seem neither to think nor to care about him.”

“I am sorry for him, but I *must* think of you most. Has this troubled you very much?”

“Me?” she said, with a little laugh; “no, how can it? You see, I am quite well; I talk, and often I grumble; but Redfern never complains, he only — dies.” Her voice dropped away to a low whisper.

Alfred turned from her with an impatient exclamation.

“Nothing of the sort,” he replied; “the mother exaggerates; it is her way to do so. Of course she believes her own exaggerations.”

He went to the window and looked out in dissatisfaction; at the moment he could hardly think of Redfern, he was too much disturbed

at the change in Violet, which seemed to have undone all the hopes of the past weeks. She followed him there, putting her hand on his arm, and looking up into his clouded face.

“What are we to do?” she said.

“I don’t know,” he answered, glancing down at her gloomily.

She took her hand away at once, and spoke with more passion.

“I have done it all. I would not forgive him; I wanted to go on hating him. If I, who loved him so, who wanted him to have more than any one else, could be so hard and cruel, how can I hope that God, to whom he is no more than others—how can I even ask Him to be kind?”

Alfred turned and put his hand on her shoulder.

“Letty,” he said, “don’t think so.”

She shrank from him and went on.

“But I must; it is true. It is I who have done it all. This is an answer to my own hard thoughts; and now I can help him in nothing—and he was my dearest!” she said, murmuring the last words in tones full of love and remorse.

Alfred started from her, and walked across the room again.

“Letty,” he said, “you try me too much.”

“Do I?” she answered; “I am sorry.”

She leant against the window-frame trembling, and did not attempt to look at him.

“Tell me what you want?” he said hurriedly; “do you want to go to him?”

She started at once from her listless attitude, and her face flushed.

“No, certainly not; that would be dreadful.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Alfred, and he came back to the window. “I thought you meant that.”

“No,” she answered, looking at him wistfully; “but if *you* would go.”

“Do you wish it?”

“Yes, very much.”

“Then I will go.”

She said “Thank you,” and leaned her head against his shoulder as he stood there, for she was very weary with anxiety and waiting.

He put his arm round her supportingly, and said “Poor child!”

She turned her pale face up to him and answered, “You are sorry for me, but you don’t think of him, and it is worse there than here.”

“He will get better yet; people who are young and strong don’t die so easily, and I will go to see. Do you want me to tell him anything?”

“No,” she said; “it is enough if you go; he will know that you come from me.”

“That is all I can do for either of you,” said Alfred, a little bitterly.

“No,” she answered, “not all. Afterwards I will love you, and you shall help me. I mean it really. I have never forgiven him in my heart before, but now—now, if this is spared me, anything else will be easy.”

“I am afraid not.”

“You don’t understand, I don’t want to go to him now, I don’t want to meddle in his life any more. I have spoilt it enough already. I wanted so much to bring some good to him, and I have brought all this evil. Now it is *my* fault for which he suffers. If only he may not be punished any more for my sin, I will be content.”

“ It has *not* been your sin.”

“ You think not, because you don’t know. All the time I have been saying to myself that I wanted no help or kindness, that the worst had come to me, and I was afraid of nothing ; so I would not pray, and I would not forgive, and I did not *want* to be happy and to like you or any one again. Now I know the worst had not come. I forgot what might come through him ; I thought only of myself ; I did not know that my wickedness would be visited on him, and that because I would feel in no other way, he must suffer. That seems cruel ; it is not his fault ; why should *he* be punished ?”

“ You are blaming yourself needlessly,” said Alfred ; “ you could not have prevented this.”

“ If I had forgiven him,” she said in a low voice, “ perhaps God would have forgiven us both.”

“ And He will now ; you are looking at things wrongly.”

“ Oh, if He will ! then I can be happy, then all will be right. I don’t want to bring back the past ; it seems right now that Red-

fern and I should be nothing to each other, and there is always you to be kind to me. If only it may be that I, who loved him so, have not altogether spoilt his life, if I may *quite* undo the past, and wipe it out, I shall be satisfied ; it is so much better than this misery which I am giving to him, or even than the hardness before, when my anger against him stood between me and all that was good.”

“And you forgive him now ?”

“Yes, will you tell him so ? I think, perhaps, it will be best after all, if you will.”

“I will tell him anything you wish.”

“Ask him to forgive me too, and tell him I will try to be happy, if only he will be so, if he will let me know that I have not spoilt his life altogether.”

“Very well,” said Alfred.

“And,” she said, clinging closer to him, “I want to ask you something. If he must die, if he is sure not to get better, will you take me to him, and let me tell him myself, and know that he forgives me first ?”

“Yes,” said Alfred, “I promise it.”

“Thank you,” she murmured, “you are

very good ; with you to help me I am not so much afraid of myself, nor of other things. I am glad you are going to him."

" I will go to-day."

" Then I shall hear to-morrow," she said.

" Yes," he said, taking her listless hand in his strong ones, and looking at her steadfastly ; " to-morrow you will hear that he is better, that he won't destroy your life with his."

" Ah," she answered, drawing a deep breath, " if it could be so ! How do you know ?"

" I feel sure of it ; he is not of the sort to die easily, especially when he wills to live."

" But does he ?"

" Do not *you* will it so ?" he answered her, and then he let her hand fall from his, and turned away.

She looked after him a little wistfully, as if she would have said more, but he bore the expression of a man who had finished speaking, and thought only of action ; so she was silent.

He left Scotland by the earliest available train, leaving her behind to wait for tidings.

CHAPTER III.

THE GIFT THAT SETS FREE.

VIOLET had not to wait long in suspense. Not many hours after her husband left her she received a telegram from him ; it was very brief, but told her all she asked to know at first.

“ I have seen Redfern ; he is a little better ; I will write to-morrow ;”—that was the whole of it.

It came to her like a glad relief ; it was the beginning of hope, and made the waiting that came after it more easy to endure.

Through all the next day Violet could expect no more news, but she lived through it very patiently. She had not dared to hope even for so much good tidings as the telegram contained, and they raised her from the

depths of utter despair to which she had sunk before.

The second morning came, and with it a letter from Alfred. She took it with trembling fingers and longing eyes; it contained the answer to the problem of her whole life, and she was afraid—though she wished with painful earnestness—to open it.

It was a long letter, but when at last she broke it open she seemed to understand its whole import at once and to be satisfied.

“DEAR LETTY,” it began,

“I have nothing but good news to tell you. Redfern is very much better; he is also quite conscious, and has been able to talk to me. He did not seem at all surprised to see me, and when I told him you had sent me, he did not seem surprised at that either.

“After I gave him your message he said, ‘I always knew that she would forgive me; although she did not believe it herself; it is against her nature to be angry long.’ Then he told me to tell you that he had no forgiveness for you, only more gratitude than he could utter. ‘No doubt,’ he said, ‘she thinks

me a moral coward, because I have given way like this, and supposes that I have given up hoping for anything now I have lost her; but, though my life will be a very different thing from what it seemed a few months ago, it will also be very different from what it would have been if I had never known her. She has given me much that I can never lose, and has shown me more that I can never forget. There are many things in life that I only guessed at vaguely before, but which she made such realities to me that I shall never again lose my faith in them. At first the loss of her seemed so dreadful, that it made me blind to everything else; now I begin to remember what a gain it is ever to have loved such a woman at all. I will not turn the blessing of the love she gave me into a curse; it shall be a blessing always that I had it for a little time. It was not fit that I should have it longer; but the trust she gave to me shall make me braver, if not happier, always; and you must tell her that my life can never be as blank again as it was before she showed me what a woman's truth and tenderness could be."

Violet could read no further ; her eyes filled with happy tears, and she bent her head lower over the clearly-written page. All her prayers were so fully answered, that it seemed as if she could never wish for anything again.

Alfred's letter continued :

“ I think this is all he told me to tell you ; I tried to remember everything, because I knew you would like to know it, and it is unlikely that we shall talk about you again.

“ Mrs. Hilborough is in rather better spirits than when I first came ; she was inclined to receive me a little angrily, but she treats me quite amicably now, and I think she finds it a relief to have me here. I am very glad I came.

“ It is a pity Redfern has had to work so hard lately, but it seems that his mother had been exceeding her means without his knowledge, and he had to make up for it.

“ They do seem very poor ; but I suppose they are better off now than they used to be, and Ref assures me that they will have a very comfortable income with his own added to his mother's. He spends so little on himself.

“The little girls were allowed to see him this afternoon; he told them I had come from you and was going back again, and asked if they would not send their love to you. The older ones did not speak, and the least of them all, said loudly, ‘No, she would not, because Ref wanted Cousin Letty, and she did not come.’

“Redfern looked at them very seriously, and said, in his earnest way, that I had come instead, and he did not want you any more; ‘and if you love me,’ he told them, ‘you must love Cousin Letty very much always; because no one in the world has ever been so kind to me as she has.’ He seemed to remember all at once that his mother was in the room, and he said to her, ‘Though you have been very good to me; much better than I deserve.’ Mrs. Hilborough, as usual, began to cry, and to say that she never did expect any gratitude from her children. She seems ready to cry upon every occasion, but she is really a good-natured creature, and very kind to me.

“The little girls came to me afterwards very quietly, and begged me to take you their love; but the youngest gave me a kiss

at once, and told me it was for you. How long must I keep it first? I am selfish and impatient perhaps, but I wish very much for the time when we shall not be so far apart.

“However, I will wait; you are very well worth waiting for.

“I intend to stay here as long as I can. I find it possible to be useful in so many ways while Redfern is out of the way. If you want me, send at once; and whenever you wish for anything, or feel very miserable, write and tell me. I like to know all about you; can’t you trust me, dear, to understand all you must feel, even when it hurts myself a little? .

“I know perfectly well that you will love me all the better for having found it hard to love me at first.

“Your affectionate husband,

“ALFRED HILBOROUGH.”

When Violet had finished the letter, she lifted it to her lips, and kissed it softly and gently. Even the words at the end did not touch her at all, except with a sweet sense of a protecting tenderness that was about her

life, that only waited her consent to come nearer and make her happy.

Her old life had not ended after all in a tragedy ; the dreadful fear that she had brought despair and death to Redfern was taken from her—that was such an awful load lifted from her heart, that anything else was easy to bear afterwards.

A strange sweet feeling of gratitude stirred in her heart.

“ God is very good to me,” she said, and she could say nothing else, though she knelt down with her face in her hands and the letter against it, and did not rise for a long time.

For all that, it seemed to her that she had gone back to Him in whom she had been used to trust, and a delicious sense of rest and safety came upon her, in spite of all that was still sad in her lot.

When she rose, it was easy to see that the sorrow left in her heart was only sadness, and no longer a horror of despair ; she felt free and almost happy ; the great oppression of hatred and anger had left her, and she was once more on good terms with all the world.

She had forgiven Redfern, and Redfern had forgiven her, and again she might give her love and her kindness to all about her ; she had grudged it before to every one in the world because her heart refused it to him.

Besides that, they had no longer parted in anger and blindness ; they had spoken, though they were a long way apart, and each knew that their love, though it had failed at last, had not merely been a dreadful and cruel mistake, it had been a true and good thing ; they could put it away without remorse or enmity, and enter on a new and separate life without the sense of having given or received a hopeless injury.

It was such a relief to emerge from the black night of fear and guilt in which Mrs. Hilborough's letter had plunged her, even into the twilight of her present hopes, that Violet did not look backwards, past that utter darkness into the full sunlight of her life before ; it was so good to feel cruel and wicked no longer, to have forgiven Redfern, to be at peace with all the world, and, above all, to have returned to her old loving faith, that she could not at present be conscious of any

further desire ; she was fully satisfied with her life ; she had got more than she had dared to ask for ; there was nothing but contentment and thankfulness in her heart.

Every morning after that letter came to her she seemed to come down into a world that was very good and beautiful ; all the trees, and the hills, and the long gleams of water were full of a delicious loveliness that came to her with new and solemn sweetness. She was very quiet in those days, and spoke little to any one, but often stood musing dreamily, in a mood of subdued quietness that was as restful to her after the past bitter rebellion as a peaceful sleep after long watching.

She gave herself completely into the care of hands stronger than her own. She knew that she herself merited no forgiveness ; but the sense of the love from which she had persistently estranged herself, was all about her life, and left no room for dismay or regrets ; her heart became quiet and peaceful, so that she asked no questions of the future, and remembered the past with no strong stirring of emotion. It was a terrible struggle

from which she had come out worn and tired, but still at rest, and full of renewed love and trust. To a nature like hers the blackest misfortune that could happen was the oppression of enmity and anger ; having escaped from that horror, she was reconciled to life again.

Her letters to her husband at this time were kinder than they had been before ; she seemed even to be grateful for his tenderness.

“ It is so good that you should go on loving me,” she wrote once, “ when I have been so wicked and hard to you ; it seems as if every one were in a hurry to forgive me when I was so slow myself to forgive.”

It was evident that she began to forget herself, and to think of him, because the idea came to her for the first time that he deserved a better sort of love than any she had left to give, and she wrote to him : “ How could you let me be so unjust as to take so much for what was worth so little ? It might be that I was mad at the time, but you were sane ; why did you not tell me the truth ?

“ I do not deserve your love ; and it is too late to ask you to take it back. You are too

good to me. Love me a little less. My own coldness to you seems a dreadful thing after your kindness. How shall I ever love you enough in return ?

“ Yet, if you knew how much I begin to rely on your affection for me, how your words seem to comfort me when I feel lost and alone, I do not think you would be sorry to have loved me, even now.”

And that letter she signed “ Your affectionate wife, Violet.”

After that, both she and Alfred began to look forward to the time when they should meet again. Both of them thought it best, however, for him to spend as much time as possible at Mrs. James Hilborough’s while Redfern was ill ; for Mrs. Hilborough was a helpless sort of woman, who needed some one to appeal to for advice and assistance. As Redfern recovered, the idea occurred to Alfred that it would a good thing for him if they could take together the tour which had been so disastrously interfered with in the spring. As soon as Redfern began to feel stronger, he wished to ignore his past illness at once, and to go on working as usual. It

would have been impossible to persuade him to take any relaxation unless Alfred asked him to go as his companion; Alfred therefore wrote to Violet and told her his idea, saying also that if they went he must come over to see her first.

Violet thanked him for having thought of the plan, saying that he always seemed to suggest the things she would wish for most.

“And come to me first, as you propose,” she added, “for I think it will do me a great deal of good to see you.”

Alfred went to Scotland for one day after all his plans were settled. He was to start for Wales with Redfern the following afternoon.

Violet met him in the garden, and put out her hand to him quite silently, leaving it in his as they walked to the house together.

They had each felt that they had a great deal to say to each other, but at first they were very silent, only asking a few questions and answering them briefly. For all that, there was no sense of estrangement between them; they trusted in each other fully, and

Violet felt a pleasant sense of protecting tenderness in her husband's presence.

Afterwards, when the first feeling of strangeness had worn off, they talked a great deal together, but very quietly, as if they were afraid of disturbing the peace and satisfaction of the moment. Violet had a peculiar faculty of entering into the life of any one she cared for, and finding an interest in the merest details of it ; so she spoke to Alfred of all he had been doing, or was going to do, listening to what he said in a gentle, attentive way.

It was some time before she could overcome her reluctance to turn the conversation to herself, and to speak of her own affairs. When she did so, it was still with gentle quietness.

“ Have you never been very angry with me for my unkindness ? ” she asked.

“ Never. How could I expect anything else to begin with ? ”

“ And do you expect it now ? ” she said, turning to him her soft patient eyes.

“ I hope for it very much.”

She looked away from him with dreamy

sadness to the distant hills ; they were sitting together on a seat in the garden, and he put his hand on hers gently, as if he would recall her thoughts to him. Her fingers nestled into his, but she did not speak for a moment.

“ You shall not wait long,” she said ; “ I feel as if I could love you, and like everything very easily. I don’t want to quarrel with my life any more ; but at present I am—not exactly tired—but I feel quite quiet, as if I did not want to feel or do anything much.”

“ You are not unhappy ?” he inquired anxiously.

“ No ; I feel almost glad every minute ; there is such a sense of relief in my life, that I don’t want to disturb myself yet. I am lazy perhaps ; but I want to be very quiet—not in my outer life, but in my own heart—just for a little.”

“ I think I understand you.”

“ It is a comfort to me to have seen you, for all that. I do so want always to have some one to love me, and I am conscious all the time, when I don’t seem to care, that you do.”

“Yes ; you never need to doubt that.”

“It was so miserable to feel rebellious ; I had no idea before how dreadful life could be if you chose to turn your face from all that is good. Now that feeling has quite gone, I don’t think I care very much at present what happens to me. I could hardly say ‘No’ very strongly to anything. It is such happiness to have put my own will away and not to be angry.”

“You would say ‘No’ if you could ?” he questioned her.

“Don’t ask me,” she answered, “how can I tell yet ? I am sure that some day I shall choose not to have said it. Is it not a very good thing indeed to have you caring for me ? Have I not loved you, in some way, all my life ? I am very glad now to have to decide nothing. You will settle my future for me, and it is pleasant to leave it to you. What a dreary thing it would have been to have to map out my own life from now, while nobody cared how I planned it. It is very good to have only one thing that is right to do, then you have not to think, and to vex yourself, and to grow impatient.”

“I am afraid, dear, this is only resignation,” he said in a low voice.

“The rest will come; don’t you know me well enough to be sure of it? Was it not always hard for me to refuse to love any one who wanted me?” she answered, with half a smile.

“Yet you have found it very hard not to refuse.”

“That was because I was wicked—because I would not forgive Redfern. How could I bear to love you, so long as I was determined to hate him? I shut my heart to all forgiveness, so it was shut to all comfort. It is different now. I am so happy to think that he does not mind very much, and that God has let me be sorry and forgive him completely, that I can bear now to keep thinking how kind you are, and almost to tell you that I love you for it.”

“May I come again when we leave Wales?”

“Yes, I shall want you then, I know,” she answered, leaning her shoulder against his as she spoke.

“Letty, dearest,” he said, clasping her hand in both his, and holding it tightly, “I

wish I could think that I shall ever make you as happy as I hope to be before long."

"I shall be as happy some day," she answered, turning to him with a smile on her lips, though her eyes were serious still; "there is no need to be in a hurry. Are not things very good for me as they are?"

They said little more after that, but returned to the house. Mr. Donaldson was infinitely relieved to see the good understanding existing between his ward and her husband. Alfred looked quite bright and hopeful, and Violet was no longer self-absorbed and forgetful; she said little, but her eyes were observant of all that he did, and her face showed an interest in all he said.

Alfred said good-bye to her alone; the time had passed when she shrank from such a farewell. He held her hand lingeringly, and looked at her longingly before they parted; but even yet he would ask her for nothing more. Violet's eyes were fixed on him earnestly, as if she understood all his tenderness and self-denial, and longed to give some return for it.

When he turned away silently, and with an effort, her fingers closed on his more firmly, and she drew nearer to him, bending her head so that it just touched him, and not unconsciously.

“ You need not leave me like that,” she said gently, “ if you would rather not. I think I almost love you now.”

His arm closed round her at once; she lifted her face and he kissed her; it was impossible for him to speak at that moment. He let her go, and went without a single word.

Violet mused afterwards in a subdued dreaminess that was half sweet and half sad.

“ It is strange that he should love me so very much,” was what she thought about it.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHANGE OF PLACES.

VIOLET HILBOROUGH was young yet, and her nature was meant to be a happy one; it was also contrary to her disposition to look back very much: her mind was always going on instead to the future, and she readily accepted the inevitable. She was not very much in the habit of walking with her head turned mentally backwards and a perpetual and regretful “if” in her mind; whatever had been done last, there was always the next thing to be done still, and it was much simpler to think of that and to go forward. Therefore after the first shock of her great loss passed away, and there was only left in her mind the distinct knowledge that all her past existence was finished and gone from

her for ever, she began again to breathe more easily, and to find a strong life still stirring in her mind and heart. She had still energies and faculties that must be used in some way, and they began to make new channels for themselves.

There was an interval of peace that almost grew to cheerfulness after her husband left her and went to Wales. The summer weather was pleasant, and Violet's mind was at ease ; there was still room for new hopes to grow in her blighted life. She also received daily pleasant letters from her husband, and it was an occupation for her evenings to answer them ; then it gave a new interest to her own actions to speak of them to some one else.

In Alfred's letters Redfern was rarely mentioned, and then only in a casual way ; Violet did not desire anything more ; her disposition was not curious, though closely sympathetic, and the wish to be acquainted with all that concerned Redfern passed away, as she knew that she could interfere in his existence no more. Yet it was a satisfaction to her to know that he was with Alfred then ;

it seemed to make the change in her position less unnatural, since it could be accepted simply by the two men who loved her, destroyed no friendships, and produced no bitterness. It was easier for her to feel a growing tenderness for her husband, when he accepted the debt she owed to Redfern as his own instead of hers, and paid it willingly for her without anger or jealousy. The feeling of regret for Redfern's lot and earnest interest in it ceased to be a cause of mental separation from Alfred, since he elected to share it with her, and to take his place by her side as a lover and helper, instead of in an opposing position as a claimant and possible reproacher.

Redfern grew well and strong ; he walked a great deal, and talked much of his art and his future work in it : that was the whole of what Violet heard concerning him. She was perfectly satisfied ; she knew that he also was saved from the great despair that had overwhelmed them both, that he was set free at last from all the influences of her life, that the ties she had so longed to rivet were broken asunder for ever ; and that was all

she dared to ask henceforth, all that she cared to know about his life afterwards. She had wholly given up the rest.

Violet's mother had again asked her to go and stay with her, but Violet delayed the visit ; she dreaded a return to any of the scenes of her past life till she could bear to have her husband with her when she saw them.

Alfred was the only one who had loved her very much, and been any help or comfort to her ; she cared only at present to receive affection from him.

Yet she began to find it lonely in those long bright days of summer ; she had no friends near, and her host and hostess were silent people : also, she began to long to see once more Monkholme, with its familiar garden and well-known surroundings. It seemed an age since she had left it ; she had passed a whole new life since then, and was ready to go back to her childhood there and begin her existence over again, taking up her old course of cheerful enjoyment where it had been broken off, at the point when she had begun to forget Alfred and to think of

Redfern. All the time between was an interlude that had no connection with the before and after. She trembled when she thought of it, but it was possible now to turn to her husband for re-assurance when it returned to her.

So she began to look forward to the time when she would again move among the trees and flowers at Monkholme, but she knew very well that she could not go there till her husband went with her.

Therefore, as the time drew near when he would leave Wales and come again to see her, she mused more and more on the possibility of giving him the affection he waited for, and she thought at last, "If he asks me to go to Monkholme very soon, I will go;" but she only uttered it in her own mind, and waited till he should seek to find it there.

After she had made that resolution, a new shyness and strangeness came upon her; her letters to her husband became quieter and more reticent in tone: she found it difficult to speak so frankly about herself, yet his expressions of affection did not please her less than before.

Nearly a month had passed since Alfred went away ; she expected a visit from him in a few days ; she waited for it dreamily and quietly, with no sensations of eagerness and with none of dread. It was a calm and sunny afternoon ; she sat in her own room, with a book in her hand that she hardly read. She expected no interruption, for visitors were rare in that house ; she had noticed no sound of an arrival, but the housemaid knocked at the door and told her she was asked for : “ Mr. Hilborough was waiting in the drawing-room.”

Violet’s face flushed, and her heart began to beat ; she had meant to receive her husband very kindly, and this sudden arrival made her feel shy and agitated. She got up at once, however, and glanced at herself in the glass ; she would have liked to put on some prettier ornaments, and to linger a little to re-arrange her hair ; but she remembered that the truest kindness was to go to him without delay, so she went down at once.

She opened the drawing-room door and went in, shutting it after her ; then she looked round and saw Redfern Hilborough.

For one moment a great flood of passionate feelings and wild thoughts swept over her, and she longed to fly away and hide herself alone for ever; then it passed, leaving her quite calm.

Redfern had met her expectant glance, and he understood the look that was not meant for him: he could not bear to see it, and so turned away; when he looked again her face had changed—it was quite calm.

She had clasped her fingers together; she came forward a little, but did not put out her hand.

“ You have come from my husband ?” she asked.

“ Yes,” answered Redfern, his eyes meeting hers and leaving them again instantly, “ Alfred sent me.”

“ Then,” said Violet, “ he is ill, or he would have come himself.”

“ Yes,” replied Redfern in low tones, “ you are quite right.”

Violet waited for a moment.

“ Will you go on, if you please,” she said then.

“ You have guessed it nearly all,” replied

Redfern, "it is dreadful to me to bring such news to you."

"Never mind that," she answered gently, "it is not your fault."

"I am not sure of that," he said very bitterly.

She looked surprised, but nothing else; her mind evidently did not pause with him, but went on at once to what he had to tell her: he saw it, and with an effort recovered his quiet tone.

"Alfred is ill, as you think; he has been hurt; I came to tell you."

"Is it very much?" she asked, her eyes seeking his in all the unconsciousness of a stronger interest than he himself presented; he could not look back at her so, but avoided her gaze and spoke hurriedly and abruptly.

"It is rather serious," he answered.

"But he will get better? He will not die?" There was no mistaking the keen anxiety in those words; Redfern roused himself completely on hearing them, and answered her firmly.

"I hope he will get better; there is hope that he may."

“How soon can I go to him? Must I get ready now?”

“I have considered the times; there is fully an hour before you must start, if you are willing to go.”

“*If I am willing!*” she repeated, with a keen accent of reproach; “did you doubt it? or did he?”

“No,” said Redfern, rather hoarsely, “I never did.”

“But *he* did?”

“If he did,” Redfern answered, “it is because he does not know you yet as you taught me to do; he will learn the lesson soon.”

“You say I have an hour,” said Violet, sitting down, and returning to the subject that interested her most; “then tell me about it: when did it happen?”

“Yesterday evening.”

“So long ago!” she said quickly, with a tone of distress in her voice; “why was I not told sooner?”

“It was too late for a letter to go.”

“And the telegraph?”

“Alfred did not wish me to send; he

begged me to wait till this morning, that he might see if he was better. He seemed to think a few hours could not matter."

"He thought I should not care so much to know?" Violet asked.

"I don't know—he seemed to think there was no reason—he thought there was no need to hurry," said Redfern reluctantly.

"And you thought so too, perhaps?" said Violet, with a flushing face; "you could not tell him anything better?"

"If I thought so then, I do not think so now; I will not make the mistake again."

"Was he better or worse when you came away?"

"About the same. The case is doubtful, but you may really hope; there is no reason to despair of his recovery."

"How was he hurt?"

"We were on the shore together. A piece of rock fell and crushed his arm and shoulder."

Violet shuddered.

"Does he suffer very much?"

"A great deal, I am afraid."

"You are sure I must wait an hour? I

wish I could be there this minute. It was cruel not to send at once."

"You might have had to travel alone. Your husband did not wish it. He thought you might be agitated, and desired me to take care of you—if you will allow me?"

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Violet without one moment's thought; "does he not want me? Has he never wished me to be there?"

"I am sure it will be a great comfort to him to see you."

She looked at him earnestly, as if in spite of the past relations between them she could speak to him easily and simply always: "It shall be," she said, "if I can make it so," and then she rose and left him.

Redfern waited alone until Mr. Donaldson came to him. He was in a curious position there, being a very unimportant person where he had used to be first. It was impossible for him not to feel the change strongly as he sat in solitude. It was nobody's business to see him; he was a mere messenger, a stranger who had no claim or interest in the house. His host soon joined him, however, and addressed him with grave politeness. Mr.

Donaldson really objected strongly to the step that had been taken in sending Redfern for Violet, but it was too late to interfere, and he made no observation upon it. He quite agreed with Violet in the idea that she ought to go to her husband at once. He therefore, by his manner, declined to see in Redfern any but the merest acquaintance, whom the stress of circumstances forced into her service, and talked to him entirely about trains and junctions.

Violet did not appear again till she was ready to start: until then she was occupied upstairs with Miss Donaldson. She was quite self-possessed and capable of arranging her plans; she was anxious to go at once, but by no means overcome. There was a task before her that she was eager to do; she was roused at last to a keen sympathy with her husband; it seemed that her love was really needed now, and she would not delay to give it.

She said farewell to her guardian and his sister, and set out with Redfern, hardly remembering that it was he who was with her, who had the charge of her for some

hours to come. She was so absorbed in the end of her journey that she was hardly conscious of the progress of it. Besides, Redfern did not need her just then, and Alfred did ; why should she think of Redfern ?

He had no desire to obtrude himself on her notice ; he attended to all needful things, looked after luggage, put her in carriages, closed or opened windows, and then sank back in his corner, silent and grave as usual. Clearly they were completely separated ; they had nothing to say to each other for evermore.

It was a very dreadful journey to Redfern, none the less so that Violet did not seem to guess it. She sat quietly gazing before her with bright still eyes, all her thoughts evidently bent on the task before her, which she longed to accomplish. "He has been very good to me before," she said to herself, "it is my turn now." It was her husband she thought of, and not Redfern.

Redfern realized fully his own isolation ; he had no aim or end to look forward to, and was at liberty to notice Violet and observe her earnest anxiety, her keen desire to reach

her husband without delay. He had learnt the hard lesson of patience and silence before, but he found it still a terrible one to practise as he watched unseen Violet's face, with its earnest eyes and tender mouth, and the simplicity and intense truthfulness of its whole expression. He looked at her, unobserved, much as an exile shut out of Eden might gaze through the half-open gates, knowing that he could never enter there again. It was his own hand, too, that had closed the door, and those inside had already forgotten him ; no heart followed him across the barriers with sympathy and affection. He felt lost and astray, and utterly alone ; he was more than exiled, he was cut off from all speech or knowledge of any mind that could help or understand him. Yet he had spoken the truth ; he would never, if he had had the choice, have retraced his life to the time when he began to know Violet, and elected not to have loved what he had so hopelessly lost. That bitter experience had left him higher than it had found him ; he could not will to step down again into ignorance that was only despair, without the relief of a conscious

regret. He was a braver and stronger man than he would have been without that episode in his life ; his melancholy might be deeper henceforth, but his bitterness would be less ; he had attained to a great sorrow, but was for ever saved from mere unfaith : he knew at least all he might have had when he saw it pass away from him.

The journey was long and wearisome, but Violet showed no signs of fatigue or impatience. She was taking her maid with her, and she seemed to think quite as much of her as of Redfern. Possibly the way in which she ignored him was a little wilful, but it was unconsciously so.

Redfern was perfectly silent during the first part of the journey ; towards the end of it he roused himself with an effort to address Violet. He had hoped that she would ask him some more questions respecting the accident ; but it did not occur to her to do so ; her mind still went on to her meeting with her husband.

“ I should like to tell you something, if you don’t mind,” he said, lifting his head and looking towards her.

“I don’t mind,” said Violet, acquiescently.

“It was my fault that the accident happened yesterday.”

“Yours! How?”

He almost answered, “Yes, you have to thank me for that too,” but he restrained himself; he had learnt at last to keep himself out of sight, even in the form of self-accusation; he comprehended that his faults interested nobody; the mention of them was as impertinent as self-praise could be. So he answered simply, “It was I who was standing under the piece of rock when it loosened and slipped down; Alfred saw it and sprang forward; he pushed me away, but did not escape himself.”

Violet listened, with attentive eyes.

“Then he was hurt in saving you?”

“Yes, he ought to have been safe; it was I who should properly have been killed,” replied Redfern gravely, with a little tone of contempt for the destiny that was always favouring him uselessly.

“He is not killed? He may get better?” said Violet anxiously.

“Yes; he was not so near as I had been.”

“Why did you let him be hurt? Could you not have helped it?”

“I did not see till it was too late. As usual, I permitted a sacrifice to be made for me where I would rather have been sacrificed myself,” he said, the bitter consciousness of his own short-comings appearing once again. “It is my fate.”

Violet looked at him with gentle kindness. “It won’t matter, if Alfred gets better,” she said in a low voice; “it would have made us both unhappy if you had not been saved.”

“Would you have cared?” he asked earnestly.

“We should both have cared very much,” she answered gently.

“Thank you. Of course, yes, I ought to have known,” and he sank back into his corner.

When she turned that way again, he was watching her still.

“Are you not very angry with me on account of this accident?” he asked abruptly.

“I don’t think about you,” she answered, with perfect calmness, turning her clear eyes upon him.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, shrinking back at once, and he did not speak again.

Violet, however, was unconsciously influenced by a new idea that turned her sympathies more strongly towards Alfred, because she had now to do battle for him against false impressions and mistaken opinions. It was possible—indeed, it seemed to her a fact—that the two men who loved her had thought that the one who should be saved to make her happiness was not the one who was her husband. All her heart rebelled against the thought, and her longing to reach Alfred and comfort him by her tenderness increased.

“He does not know, he does not know,” she repeated to herself, “but I will make him understand. He must never think that my love could turn back *now* and leave him again.”

They had travelled through the night, and it was not yet dawn when they reached the small station where they were to get out. There was a difficulty about horses, and Violet at once said that rather than wait there she would walk the short distance still.

left to go: so the luggage was left at the station, and in the semi-darkness of the summer night she started with Redfern and her maid down a steep winding lane, with a mountain behind them, hedges on each side, and the scent of the sea-air in their faces. A short distance brought them to the inn where the young men were staying. Redfern went upstairs first to prepare Alfred for Violet's arrival; she would not sit down in the meantime, but waited standing, and her face was very anxious and grave. Redfern returned almost immediately, and she followed him upstairs. He opened the door, and let her go in alone. A small light was burning in the room; she saw at a glance all it contained, and her husband's face turned expectantly towards her. He smiled, and put out the hand he could move: she went to him and laid her own on it silently, then she knelt by the bedside, looking at him earnestly, without speaking.

“You have come to me, Letty,” he said.

“Yes, dear; and I am so glad to come,” she answered, putting her face down on the pillow beside him.

“ You will only need to have patience a little longer, my dearest,” he said quietly, but with a caressing tone in his voice.

Violet kissed his hand with a low sob, but she could not answer him a single word.

CHAPTER V.

HUSBAND AND LOVER.

VIOLET was correct in her impression ; her husband believed that his death would only set her free and open the road for her to happiness. It seemed to him an easy solution of the difficulties that shut them all in, and, indeed, the only possible one. Life was very dear to him in his youth and strength, and Violet was dearer to him still, yet he saw no other way of serving her than of giving up her and life together. Such a choice would never have occurred to his healthy mind under other circumstances, but it flashed upon him like a revelation as he saw Redfern's sudden danger on the shore, and the consciousness of all the consequences of his act, as he sprang forward to save him,

changed a mere courageous effort into an elected self-sacrifice.

As he waited for her coming he looked all the future in the face, and steadfastly refused to see the chance of his recovery ; no regret entered his mind then, his love had demanded hard things from him, and he had done them all, one by one, as they came to him ; for he was not one who desired or calculated great efforts, he was not born a hero to create fine actions out of simple things ; when the actions were demanded of him he was capable of doing them, without thinking of them before or after, that was all.

He felt no rancour against Redfern, who was simply a part of those circumstances to which fate or providence meant his life to give way. Strong and simple natures in all ages have shown the same calm submission to the inevitable, although they have given it different names ; they have had the courage to place themselves on the side of the power that ruled them, and to decline to struggle or be angry where anger would avail nothing, and so there has been something grand even in their defeat. Alfred was not destitute of

that calm courage that belonged to the Hibboroughs as a race, though his life and thoughts were commonplace enough.

He was therefore not inclined to protest against his lot ; he only desired to have Violet with him, to let her kindness comfort him for a little, and after that he was content to let her go for ever ; she had always belonged to Redfern, never really to him.

Violet knew by the complete tenderness of his voice and look that he only believed she had come to him for a farewell ; he thought there was no need to consider her doubtful feelings any more ; he could ask so little that he asked it unhesitatingly.

Her heart rebelled against such an idea, but she did not know how to speak her thoughts, or to answer an unspoken idea. She could not begin the subject and say : "I do not want you to die." She could only look at him with such unuttered feeling that her eyes were mysteries to him ; he could not tell if they expressed merely pity and affection, or complete sympathy and love.

She knew he did not comprehend what she felt at that time, how she would have

given her life to save his, but she could not tell it ; words seemed useless then ; she waited that her tenderness might speak for itself.

Although Alfred had believed that he would die, and had, on the whole, *meant* to die, insomuch as he ignored the chance of his recovery, Violet never for one moment doubted that he would get better. No great terror oppressed her, as it had done when Redfern was ill ; she had never taken the view of the matter which included her husband's possible death : she understood that he was in danger, and that he fancied she did not care for him to live ; she went to give him the assurance that she cared very much indeed ; all her anxiety was to make him comprehend that ; and then, she thought—somehow—he would certainly be restored to her.

Alfred gave himself up to her care completely ; there was no immediate danger, and he did not trouble her or himself by discussions of any subject. He watched her earnestly, however, and was perplexed by her manner to him, and roused to an interest

more passionate than he had intended to give to anything again. She seemed wholly absorbed in him, as if she had no interests that reached past his own ; there was courage and quietness too in her kindness, as if she took it as a part of her life ; it had no regretfulness in it, as in the kindness of a parting.

He watched her and wondered often, and when she caught the look of inquiry in his eyes, her own grew earnest and longing, as if they tried to answer him, though she could not bear to recognize his doubts by speaking of them. She saw very little of Redfern, though he was in the same house, and took all outside business off her hands ; she was always absorbed in Alfred—till he returned to perfect safety and a full belief in her, she could think of nothing else.

At first her manner to her husband was only tender and attentive, but as she grew more accustomed to her new position, and as the impression of solemnity and almost tragic misunderstanding wore away, she became more cheerful, and tyrannized over her patient, teasing him and laughing at his ideas, instead of allowing them to make her

unhappy. She began to talk about the future, too, in a confident manner, and Alfred listened wonderingly.

Several days had passed since she had arrived ; there was no doubt that Alfred was better, and he had also given up the first extreme tenderness which had implied renunciation ; he had even allowed himself to be a little cross to her, and that would never have suited his previous solemn ideas of approaching separation.

Violet felt very happy ; the day was bright and the air sweet ; she had been out for a short time on the shore, where the wild sea beating on the stones had seemed to sing a beautiful and solemn chant. Alfred had heard her laugh as she paused outside his door to speak to Redfern ; she came in with rosy cheeks and sat down by the window, taking some work in her hand, and singing a low song, in a voice full of contentment.

He lay still and watched her ; she knew that he did so, but thought the occupation was in no way harmful ; on the contrary, a smile came into her eyes and her face flushed

a little, but she paid no apparent attention to him, and went on with her song and her work.

“Letty,” he said at length, in a low, serious voice, “if you don’t want me to get better you should not make life so pleasant.”

She put down her work and turned to him; her face, which had seemed all cheerfulness in the sunlight, was all tenderness in the shadow.

“I do want you very much to get better,” she said.

“Dear,” he answered, “you should not say so if it is not true, because I should like so much to believe it.”

She went and knelt down beside him, looking with earnest eyes into his.

“It is quite true,” she said; “I wish you to believe it.”

“How can it be true?” he asked impatiently, “you never loved me.”

“For all that,” she said, “I love you now.”

He looked back at her earnestly.

“I believe you are wicked, and would tell stories to satisfy me.”

“ Do I look as if I told you stories at this minute ?” she asked him.

“ No,” he answered ; “ your eyes are true ; it is hard not to believe them.”

“ Suppose then,” she said, “ you give up doing hard things.”

“ But then you are always kind to people who are unhappy.”

“ I don’t know why *you* should be unhappy,” she answered.

She put her hand on his and bent her head lower, asking softly, “ Won’t you believe me ?”

“ I don’t know,” he answered slowly.

After that they were both silent for a little ; then Alfred spoke with an effort :

“ Of course I know you are willing to make a sacrifice for my sake.”

“ Very well. If you like to think so,” she answered in a whisper, “ I shall not persuade you any more. You must find out for yourself. I knew before that you thought this ; but I fancied speaking was no use ; it was better that you should see for yourself.”

He was silent ; he longed so much to believe her that he dared not do it yet.

“ You should have let me die before saying this,” he said, rather abruptly ; “ I was very willing to do it for you.”

“ I knew that,” she said, “ and it made me very miserable to think so.”

“ It is different now,” he went on.

“ Very different,” she acquiesced ; “ at least, I hope it is.”

He was silent again ; he thought for some minutes before he answered, “ I know you are capable of persuading yourself anything at a time like this, but don’t you think you will sometime be sorry that I have believed you ?”

“ How can I speak for the future ?” she answered earnestly ; “ only I am never afraid of it when I am being true to the things that are *now* ; ask me in a year if I am sorry, and I will tell you.”

“ In a year !” he repeated, “ that is a long time ;” and then the thoughts of both went back to the past twelve months with all its changes.

“ You have meant to behave badly, and like a coward,” Violet said after a pause, and she took his hand between her two hands and

looked at him ; “ you made up your mind to go away and leave me quite alone, when you knew I had nobody else.”

“ I did not know you wanted me, dear,” he answered.

“ I wanted you very much. Think how lonely I should have been. You know I have no one now to take care of me but you.”

“ I will do it then,” he said.

After that conversation Alfred ceased to be doubtful and perplexed ; he gave himself up completely to the cheerful influences of Violet’s presence ; he did not believe that she loved him so entirely as she persuaded herself, but he knew that he could wholly trust to her faithful affection not to fall back into regrets or reproaches.

Violet was relieved, too, that she had expressed a little of all that had been in her thoughts ; her mind was more at ease, and she paid more attention to outside things, spoke more to Redfern, and began to feel grateful to him. He perceived the change, and guessed that it proceeded from a happier understanding with Alfred, but he shrank

from her kindness, and was more anxious to escape as she seemed to require him less and to notice him more. He had not to endure his position long.

Alfred progressed daily towards complete recovery, and letters began to arrive from Violet's own home begging her to go there as soon as she could leave him. Her eldest sister was already married ; Violet had declined going to the wedding, but it had taken place some weeks before. Her brother was also settled in life ; he had married very suddenly a wealthy lady who was much older than himself. His pecuniary difficulties were therefore over, and he was no longer in his mother's house ; but he had not made life an easier thing for himself, because his elderly heiress had a very strong will and very secure settlements, so that he was under a firmer rule than he had ever submitted to in his life before.

Mrs. Hilborough was intending to give up her house and go to Italy with her second daughter. Her doctor said that the change ought to be taken at once, on account of the state of Sarah's health. They therefore ex-

pected to start for the south in little more than a week.

Mrs. Hilborough was naturally very anxious to see Violet before leaving England for an indefinite period, and was disturbed that she should have refused to come for so long ; but Sarah was still more earnest about it than she was ; she knew very well that the change of climate from which she hoped to benefit had been secured at the cost of her sister's happiness ; she felt that her own return to England was uncertain, and so she began to wish very much to see Violet before she went, and to be assured in some measure of her welfare and her forgiveness. Her mind and conscience had been at last roused to a keen interest in the younger sister whom they had all noticed so little, and she could not go away at rest without having spoken to her.

“ We have no right to ask you to leave your husband on our account,” she wrote to Violet, “ but now that he is better it would be a great comfort if you could come for only one day.”

Mrs. Hilborough wrote that she herself

would go to Wales to see Violet if nothing else could be arranged.

“I cannot leave England without seeing you,” she wrote, “especially as such changes have happened since I saw you last.”

“I have been very selfish not to let you go before,” Alfred said, when he read those letters.

“I am afraid I don’t want to go,” said Violet gravely.

“But you ought to do; they are going away, you see.”

“I know I ought; but I don’t like to leave you,” she said.

“I shall be well enough to come to you directly—in a week; I am well enough to do without you now, though it won’t be an agreeable change.”

“You would be sure to come?” said Violet.

“Of course, if you want me. You know that very well.”

“You are really better. I don’t think you can possibly die now, even if you try,” she said, smiling.

“I will promise you not to try.”

“She knows perfectly well,” answered Redfern, “that I am at her service and yours now and always.”

“There, Letty,” said Alfred, “there is a fine sentiment for you—now you may go on.”

“I think I ought to go to mamma,” said Violet, “I ought to have gone before.”

“I understand,” said Redfern.

“Only I should not like Alfred to be alone; he is better of course; but he might not be looked after when I am away. I thought, perhaps, you would be kind enough to promise to stay with him.”

“Very well,” said Redfern briefly.

“I hope you don’t mind,” said Violet, not satisfied by his tone; “perhaps he really needs no one, but I don’t like to leave him yet.”

Alfred’s arm was on the back of her chair, she leaned against it caressingly, and turned towards him as she spoke. Redfern saw that movement too, though he did not look at her.

“I will do whatever you like,” he said in a low voice.

“Thank you. I shall be glad if you will stay till he is able to come to me; that will

be very soon ; then I can go to-morrow. I hope it is not inconvenient."

"The inconvenience would not matter, if there were any," said Redfern, "but there is none." He stood erect then, and turned towards them; but his eyes had a distant, unsatisfied look. "Can I do any business for you to-night ?" he asked.

"No, thank you," Violet answered.

He took that for his dismissal, and was glad to go.

Violet went away the next day with her maid, and Redfern took her to the station, saw her luggage into the van, and stood at the carriage door till the train started. There was no feeling of companionship between them, for all that ; Redfern knew that he no more belonged to her life now than did the porters who were lounging about.

"I hope he will manage without me," said Violet wistfully, thinking of her husband.

"He is sure to get well now," said Redfern briefly.

"I ought to thank you," said Violet, with a sudden awakening ; "you have been very kind; I am afraid I have not seemed grateful enough."

“That is nothing,” he said quickly; “I don’t want gratitude.”

The porter closed the door, and Redfern stepped back on to the platform.

“You change at Chester,” he said, and that was all his farewell.

The train began to move; he heard her say good-bye, but he could answer nothing himself; he lifted his hat gravely, and turned away without speaking; she could see him walking down the platform, and he did not look round once.

She leaned back in the carriage and thought of other things, of her home, and of her husband, but Redfern had left his life behind him as he went from her, and he knew it very well, and knew also that no one in the world cared to think of it. There was nothing henceforth left for him but silence; his sadness had no more place than his love in any life but his own.

CHAPTER VI.

MOTHER AND SISTER.

VIOLET's own home was much changed since she had left it ; her eldest sister had gone elsewhere to take charge of the weak-voiced curate, and her brother did not haunt it so much as before. There was no one left but her mother and Sarah.

In the house, too, there were signs of an approaching removal ; boxes were already packed, and furniture was deposited in unusual places.

Both her mother and sister were very glad to see her. They met her again with feelings of curiosity as well as of affection. They had understood so little of all that had happened to her, that they looked with

anxiety for any change or any explanation that could be found in her manner. They discovered no discontent or agitation ; her face had a quieter expression, and her eyes were graver. There was also a little more reserve, and, therefore, perhaps a little more graciousness in her manner ; a sense of self-protection about her, as if she declined to have her secret life entered into, and was all the more courteous on that account.

Mrs. Hilborough was soon satisfied ; she perceived that Violet had gone through some great trials, and had come out safely, so she thought there was no cause for regret : in her somewhat hard philosophy she believed that disenchantment and disappointment must come to every one ; she looked upon them therefore as things of course, and had little sympathy to give where no practical help was wanted.

Her daughter Sarah felt differently. She had been more alone since her sister married, and her failing health had given her a consciousness of weakness and need. She felt a strong interest in the younger sister who had been sacrificed for them ; who must have

gone through sudden sorrows, and who told them nothing of it all. She watched Violet anxiously, and longed to speak to her, but she dared not do it at first. Solitude and illness had made her reflect on much that she had never thought of before ; she began to understand how coldly they had treated Violet, making use of her merely, and not caring to enter into her life. With this new light thrown back on other days, she remembered that it had always been so, and that in her childhood she had seen the same ignoring of feelings that must have existed in another mind. She recollectcd the life that Violet's father had lead amongst them, and knew that he had never been really one of the household which he supported. They had used him, and nothing more ; except for his little daughter, he had been quite alone amongst them all. He had never spoken of himself any more than Violet did.

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Violet saw at once that Sarah actually wanted her affection and sympathy, and she was not slow to give all the kind attentions that are very comforting to an invalid, but she did not encourage conversation about herself.

It was several days before Sarah ventured to say to her :

“ You don’t seem to be unhappy, Violet.”

“ I am not unhappy,” Violet answered.

“ Yet you have had a great deal to suffer,” she went on, and to that Violet answered nothing.

“ You must feel angry with us all.”

“ It was not your fault,” said Violet, rather coldly.

“ But it was on our account, I suppose,” Sarah observed.

“ I thought of you, certainly.”

“ And we are not very grateful.”

“ I never expected you to be,” said Violet, with a slight tone of displeasure.

“ It must have been very dreadful to you at the time,” Sarah ventured to suggest.

“ It is ended now, at any rate.”

“ You say so, but I am afraid it can’t be. I remember now, though I did not notice it at the time, how much you seemed to care for him, and I don’t think you change easily.”

Violet turned and looked at her steadily.

“ I cared for him very much indeed, and

now I love my husband, and I don't change easily. Will you never talk about it again?"

Sarah never ventured to do so, but she spoke on the subject to her mother.

"I don't understand it at all," she said, "Violet seems quite contented."

"I don't think she is quite contented," replied Mrs. Hilborough, "but she is too wise to complain now. If the Hilboroughs make a mistake, or meet with a loss, you don't generally hear them talk about it much afterwards. They don't announce it to their acquaintances."

"You think she is unhappy then?" said Sarah, rather dismayed.

"Not exactly. She cannot be perfectly satisfied yet; but it will be very much better for her in the end to have married Alfred. She will find it out in time."

Mrs. Hilborough also attempted to speak to Violet about her sudden marriage.

"I never understood properly how it happened," she remarked, "I should like you to tell me, if you have no objection."

"It would be quite impossible for me to tell you," said Violet with slow calmness.

“ Alfred knows how it all happened, and it does not matter to any one else in the world.”

“ Very well, if you would rather not talk about it. I should like to tell you, however, that I am perfectly satisfied with the change that occurred.”

“ Are you?” said Violet, feeling suddenly hurt and wounded.

“ Alfred is a very suitable husband for you indeed. Your marriage is a most sensible one.”

“ I know that,” said Violet, in a tone of careful calmness.

“ It was a pity you ever were allowed to engage yourself to any one else.”

Violet rose at once. Hardly any one else said things that made her feel so hot and angry as her mother’s speeches did ; they ignored or slighted all those fine influences of life which seemed to Violet to make its highest part. She did not know what to answer her, and it was difficult to be patient.

“ I don’t think so,” she said : “ I am not sorry. I would never choose to undo it.”

Her mother looked at her curiously ; she

understood' much that Violet felt without sympathising with it ; she merely observed her, as she had learnt to observe her husband years before.

“ Very well, my dear ; that is all the better,” she said quietly ; “ you have nothing then to regret.”

Violet had one more conversational ordeal to go through, and that was when she saw her brother. He came on a short visit while she was at home. He also had his decided opinions on the subject of her marriage, and he confided them to his wife.

“ I only wonder,” he observed, “ that she did not throw him over before, as soon as the old man died in fact, for he was nothing to look at ; she must have preferred the other one all the time, but then she had to satisfy the old gentleman. However, I suppose she waited to do the thing neatly.”

He expressed some of his ideas also to Violet.

“ So you did not have him after all ?” he remarked. “ I always knew you would not. This one is something like a fine fellow, but I suppose he is not particularly clever. It

was the other one who had the brains. However, you have sense enough for two."

Violet learnt more thoroughly in the uncongenial atmosphere of her mother's house to appreciate her husband's tender and comprehending sympathy. She heard from him daily ; his letters were not written by his own hand, he dictated them to Redfern. They were therefore written in some restraint, but she knew well how to interpret them ; and it happened in this way that even Redfern's handwriting—the sight of which had once made her heart throb, and her eyes brighten—became familiarised to her again, and indissolubly connected with the idea of her husband rather than of himself.

Mrs. Hilborough also knew the handwriting very well, because of the letters that had come to Violet when she was last at home. She disapproved very strongly of the fact that Redfern had been in Wales when her daughter was there, and when the first letter arrived directed by him, she took it to Violet herself, looking at her keenly as she gave it.

Violet smiled a little as she tore it open.

“It is from my husband,” she said, “he cannot write himself, and Redfern writes for him.”

“Oh, indeed,” replied Mrs. Hilborough stiffly, and she made no further remark.

She had before noticed with wonder a tendency in certain characters to rush blindly into dangers, and to escape strangely. They acted from a world of thought outside her own ; she never approved of that world, but she did not interfere with it. She saw distinctly the fine working of certain instruments, but perceived no advantage in the fineness ; she did her own work with a tacit observation and condemnation of theirs.

If Violêt learnt to receive Redfern’s handwriting indifferently, he did not learn to send it so. He had found no new outlet for his life, as she had done ; he had been forced into no new relations. He wrote the letters as he was asked to do, and said no single word about them. Alfred was very considerate, and made them as matter of fact as possible, but there was always the tone of interest and of possession running through them, and Redfern felt keenly that he himself had no.

interest or possession in Violet's life. He wrote the letters and gave them to Alfred to read over, and he knew perfectly well that a line was scribbled in pencil at the end ; afterwards he addressed the envelope, and went out to post it without making a single remark. Yet he felt every time that in doing so he put another seal on his own strangeness and isolation. He was not allowed to bury his lost love out of sight and to forget it ; he was perpetually required to dig it up again and make use of it for others, and he was not suspected of any wish to protest. Silence is a great virtue, but it is a virtue to which the world is little grateful, for much consideration is rarely shown to those who with difficulty speak to ask it.

Before the week was over, Violet was very weary of her loneliness at home. It seemed impossible there to be true to herself without being unjust to others ; she must either tamely acquiesce in a tone of thought that seemed to her wrong and false, or she must do battle continually to maintain ideas that she would rather have held silently. She longed earnestly to be again with Alfred, to have no

need to explain herself, or to struggle to uphold the views that made her life; she wanted again the peace and comfort of his kindly presence, and she wanted quietness and a sense of rest.

She thought continually of Monkholme, and yearned to be there once more; she was not at home; she wanted a home again where she might feel satisfied and at peace. Every day the longing grew stronger. She seemed no more to be needed in her mother's house—even Sarah was entirely occupied in packing and planning; she was quite out of place there, unattached to anything. Alfred was to come to her in a few days; she decided to wait for him no longer; she would go to Monkholme at once, and he should join her there. It was nearer to Wales than her mother's house, and that arrangement would save him the fatigue of a second journey; besides, it would be pleasanter to receive him alone than in the midst of bustle and excitement. Above all, she wanted to be at home, at her own home that she loved. She longed to go there alone, and to enter it again with no one present. It seemed years since she

had left it ; she desired unutterably to find herself once more in its familiar places, with no need to leave them again.

So she went quite suddenly, her mother making no objection. She wrote to Alfred to tell him her change of plans one day, and to ask him to go to Monkholme instead of to her mother's, and she went herself the day afterwards.

CHAPTER VII.

ONCE MORE IN THE GARDEN.

IT was a summer afternoon when Violet returned to Monkholme. Her going away had been very sad, and her coming back was very lonely. She got out at the well-known station, and the porter she had been used to see there came and took her boxes; it seemed all at once, as she stepped on to the platform, that she had never been away, and the old time had come back as it used to be.

But a sense of change came over her as she drove up the lanes homewards; all outward things were the same; every tree had its familiar place, and the children who stepped aside out of the dust into the tall grass by the wayside were the same children who had courtsied to her some months before.

Only in her mind there was the knowledge of her own altered life, and of the great blanks left where love had been before.

Monkholme itself looked luxuriously beautiful when she reached it ; all its creepers were green and thick with leaves, the starry clematis was in flower on its sunny wall, and the scent of its roses made the air sweet around it. Its gray gables rising from their green covering against the hill behind it, its rich fantastical garden spreading in front, made a picture so well known, so long loved, so much desired, that Violet hardly knew how to bear the sweet sadness of seeing it again.

Violet did not linger in the garden, she went at once into the house. She had written to announce her coming, and was therefore expected. All the rooms were bright and sunny as usual, but there was a terrible silence and emptiness everywhere.

She could not rest till she had wandered into all the rooms ; the place was her own now, everything belonged to her, and there was a desolate feeling in knowing it. The house seemed too large and too full of light,

and the sweet garden outside was a mere beautiful wilderness, uninhabited by human hopes. She went and tried the tones of her old piano, and broke down in attempting to play it; she shut it up again, because she could not bear the full clear sounds in the silent place.

She went to sit in the library with her grandfather's grim old books about her; the window was open, the white curtains stirred in the breeze that came in, bringing the breath of flowers and the twitter of birds. The large red roses fell over the window, heavy with their own bloom, the pigeons fluttered outside, and Violet felt strange to them; she hardly knew them any more, and they had done very well without her.

She had tea brought there for her, and took it in solitude, the cheerful sounds from outside coming in to mark more distinctly the silence within. Like a picture seen years before, there came back on her mind the memory of another summer evening when she had not been alone, but Redfern had sat there with her in the sombre room, and the roses had been as sweet as they were to-day.

When she had finished her solitary meal, she got up and stepped through the window into the garden. She felt a kind of awe in venturing there again, as if she were coming back to a sacred place after long absence ; there was such a great break in her life between the time when she had last wandered there and this return, that she did not know how to link the two together, and feel unchanged in the place that was still the same.

There was an atmosphere of solitude about the garden ; the birds had taken possession of it, and stared at her as at an intruder ; the thrushes and blackbirds were tamer than before, bold in a sense of possession ; but the pigeons were more distant and timorous. The place was not altogether neglected, but it had a look of desertion ; a few fallen leaves were lying about, everything was more wildly luxuriant than usual ; straggling branches had ventured to reach across the pathway, and the flowers had encroached upon the lawn. There was the undefinable air of solitude which soon creeps over an unfrequented garden ; no recent step had dis-

turbed the pebbles or trodden down the grass; the path was green and mouldy, the flowers were blowing and fading in all stages of growth and decay; no hand had plucked off the full-blown roses; they drooped heavily from over-burdened trees, and the petals were lying beneath them, or falling slowly in the breeze.

The place was very sweet and quiet; a gurgling murmur came from the stream below; the gusts of wind brought passing wafts of scent from the honeysuckle climbing the hedges; a thrush sang in a bush near, and the slow white swans moved with sleepy stateliness over the pond; the great waxen lilies were in flower on the quiet water inside the green mouldering stones, which were stained with weather, tufted with fern, and wreathed with dark ivy and tender-leaved toad-flax.

Violet walked lightly, afraid of her own soft step on the soft lawn, the clear streamlet trickled downwards with a cheerful sound as she passed it, and she heard a lark singing high above a golden cornfield beyond the bounds of her garden; but these were voices

without words, and her own thoughts were left to supply their meaning.

All the place was full of memories ; she hardly knew how to endure the solitude which left such room for recollections. She doubted her own wisdom in having come alone, yet she could not have borne any presence at that moment. That garden had witnessed nearly all the events of her life ; it had been terribly connected with the last event of it, when Monkholme had been nearly lost to her ; it was now her own for always, but she had given herself in exchange. There she had lived and played and loved, had been happy, had sorrowed, and now found herself alone, her old life parted from her, her sorrows and joys of former days, things that could touch her no more.

There she had met Redfern and talked to him, there it was that her heart had so often throbbed at his presence ; and the memories of her old feelings thronged back into her mind till she hardly knew who it was that stood alone in the garden, Redfern's love, or Alfred's wife.

Her thoughts went back further to the

sunny days of her childhood, where she had played with Alfred, scolded Gerald, and wondered at Redfern. She remembered him in those days, such a dark, solitary, distinct figure in the pleasant landscape, the unconvertible creature who was to have no place in their paradise.

Afterwards her ideas had changed, and she had thought that no paradise was conceivable from which he could be banished, and she would have given her own place there to him rather than know him to be shut out.

Now again their lives were divided, no link of sympathy existed between them; his happiness or sorrow, his loss or gain, did not concern her any more.

She reviewed all the changes of her life, with its affections and disappointments. She had loved her father, and her grandfather, Alfred and Redfern; the last love had been the one passion of her life, the others were only tender affections. Now she looked back upon it as on something that had happened in another world, a terrible episode which she had left behind her, to return only to the

quiet, happy kindness of her former days. She could not conceive that she was the same Violet who had loved so intensely and sorrowed so bitterly ; that one great storm of her life seemed no true part of it : it left her no rights of sweet memory or gentle regret, as her other losses did ; it had swept away, and no trace of it could be retained.

Of all those she had loved, Alfred only remained to her ; the rest had left her one by one ; but for him, she would be alone. She needed his affection very sorely ; her solitary mood had already passed away, leaving her hungering for some sympathy and love. There was no one to speak to in all the sweet lonely garden, no eyes to look at her with tender assurance ; the beauty seemed wasted, the silence oppressive, and she thought of Alfred in Wales, and wished he could come to her.

She went down over the sloping grass, which was yellow with sunshine, and marked with long tree-shadows that came to meet her ; she went down to the stream, which had been Redfern's favourite haunt, into the broken light under its shading trees, and she

turned to walk slowly along its banks through the green plantation.

The level sunlight struck through the close leaves and between the thick stems ; the brook was lazy, and flowed on softly without any rushing noise ; it was not loud enough to drown the sound of an approaching step which she heard among the bushes further on. It was the first human sound she had heard in the garden, and she went on to meet it, thinking that it might be Lucy coming to seek her.

But the step was firmer than Lucy's, it struck the pebbles strongly and quickly, and it was a man's arm that crashed away the overgrown branches reaching across to meet each other.

Violet stood still and looked, trembling a little, first with wonder, and then with hope. She held her breath for a minute till the intruder came fully into sight ; then she sprang forward with a sudden cry, put her hand in his arm, and hid her face against it.

“ Letty !” he said, in a tone of surprise.

It was Alfred ; he bent over her carressingly, and then stood looking a little doubtful and perplexed.

“ It is really you,” said Violet.

“ Yes. I did not know you were here.”

“ Did you not get my letter this morning?”
she asked.

“ No. The post comes late, and I left
early.”

He spoke still with some embarrassment,
as if feeling that his presence required expla-
nation.

“ I had no idea you would come to Monk-
holme,” she said.

“ No ; I ought not to have come, of course,
till you wished it, but then I did not know
you would be here.”

“ I only made up my mind yesterday.”

“ I found out that Redfern was wanted at
home, and he would not go till I went ; I
was well enough to come away, so I decided
to do it. I wrote to tell you to-day ; I should
have come on to your mother’s to-morrow.
I fancied I should like to have a glance at
this place ; I did not suppose it would matter
to any one.”

“ And you are really better ?”

She turned her face to look up at him.

“ Don’t I look so ? I am all right now.”

He did not appear satisfied, for all that ; his face was not so full of contentment as hers was ; she had got the presence she desired, and was so satisfied that she did not notice how slightly he responded to her welcome.

She had nothing to say ; she felt comforted to have him with her, and was content to be silent ; but he was pondering gravely.

“ I suppose you came here to be alone,” he said, in a low embarrassed tone.

“ Yes ; I wanted to get away from the others very much, though they were kind to me.”

“ And I come without consent or consideration, after you had been so kind to me before.”

“ What do you mean ?” she said, lifting her head.

He misunderstood the movement, and stepped a little from her, so that her hand slipped from his arm.

“ It must seem as if I meant to force myself upon you, whether you like it or not, after I had promised that I never would.”

Violet looked bewildered.

“ I won’t do that,” he went on ; “ I never intended to do. I understand perfectly your kindness when I was hurt, and I won’t presume upon it to take more than you like to give.”

“ I don’t understand.”

“ I mean that I should not have come here to-day—to your own home—if I had guessed you would be here.”

“ Of course you did not expect to find me,” she could only say.

“ If I had done, I would have kept away till you asked me to come. You have never said yet you would like to be here with me. Don’t think you are never to be free from me because I married you.”

“ You are talking about what I don’t comprehend.”

“ I mean that you shall have the solitude you came to find here ; I am vexed that you have found me haunting the place, but you shall be free. I will go away.”

She started forward.

“ Oh, Alfred, why should you ? What can you mean ?”

“ I have no real right here.”

“ But if I want you ?”

“ You *don’t* want me.”

“ Oh, I do. Very much—so much—you don’t know ! I have been so lonely. The place is so dreadful with no one in it. Don’t leave me alone again.”

Her voice had a tone of entreaty in it ; she went forward and lifted her face with an earnest look, and she raised her hand for him to take.

He took it, and drew her nearer ; she leaned against him with a sigh of relief, and let her head rest on his shoulder.

“ It can’t be that you would like me to stay,” he said.

“ Yes, I should ; very much ; why not ?”

“ You never asked me to come.”

“ I did not know you could ; but I wanted you, I have wanted you before. I have been so lonely. All the things that have ever happened, came and seemed to speak to me, and I could not answer them alone. I longed for you so much, and I was so glad when I saw you here. And now you will leave me again. You will go away ?” she asked.

His arms closed round her firmly, and he bent his head near hers.

“Never, my dearest; if you wish me to stay,” he answered.

“I do wish it,” she said, in a whisper.

He said no more for a few moments; he was too happy to feel her resting against him, content to have his sheltering arms about her; but he hardly dared to believe his own happiness.

“Letty,” he said, “do you know all you are asking? It was different before, when you had me only for a short time, and other people were there too; it was different when I was hurt and you wanted to be kind to me: Can you bear to have me with you *always*, never to be rid of me?”

“I can bear it much better than to let you go.”

He held her closer to him with a beating heart, and could not answer her.

“And yet,” he said, after a silence which she did not attempt to break, “how can I dare to be so happy? Forgive me, dear, for remembering it, but you loved him so much, and it is such a short time since; you *cannot* care for me yet.”

She lifted her head then, and moved a little from him, looking at him with clear grave eyes.

“It is true that I loved him,” she said, “more than I could ever say. And if he had let me, I should have gone on loving him always, and never thought anything else possible. If he had been unkind or unjust, I should have loved him still; but you know I had to give it up, that I had no right to go on any more. It was very terrible, but it is ended.”

She trembled a little, and her head drooped.

“Are you sure of it?” he asked.

“Quite sure. I love you now, not him. I speak the truth; did I ever tell you anything else? I married you, and now I love you. I have no one else at all to think of. Do you want me to go back again? I don’t go back easily when I begin to love any one. I never did. Must I now?”

“Indeed, no,” he answered; “I want your love more than anything else in the world. I have wanted it all my life.”

“I am so happy to give it,” she whispered. “It was my wish to love him, it was the

choice of my life, but I was not to have it. What right had I to ask it? How did I know it was better for him or for me? It is not for us to choose; we should wait for what comes to us; that is always good enough if we will only not be impatient."

"Are you quite content then?" he asked.

"Quite content," she answered, "if you will never go away again and leave me alone."

"I never will," he said, "since you will let me stay."

"Yes," she said softly, "you must stay always. Is not this your home? and am I not your wife?"

She lifted her face to meet his kiss, and after that he never doubted any more.

The next morning was bright and clear; the garden looked a less deserted place, and the songs of the birds filled it cheerily.

The calm sunshine lay on the roads, and made them hot between the high close hedges. The two Miss Lloyds walked up the lane leading to Monkholme, and they had very serious faces. They had heard of Violet's

arrival, and were coming to call upon her. The news of her return had spread through the village, reaching her friends and filling them with perplexity. Alfred had arrived later, and they had not heard of his coming.

The Miss Woods were not such particular friends of Violet's, and they might delay their visit; but Lucy and Mary Lloyd felt that they ought to go at once.

It was a very perplexing business, all the same, and they would much have preferred to let some one else lead the way, and make the first discoveries. Conflicting reports had reached the place respecting Violet and her unexpected marriage; no one knew the truth concerning it. It was said that she had quarrelled with Redfern, and been obliged to marry Alfred, or had not quarrelled with Redfern and yet had been obliged to marry Alfred; or had quarrelled with Redfern and married Alfred of her own accord; no one knew which report was true, but it was certain that her engagement had been suddenly broken off, her marriage hastily carried out, and that afterwards she had been parted from her husband, and had now re-

turned to Monkholme alone. Rumours had also come of Alfred's accident in Wales, and of Violet having been there with him, and Redfern too ; but that was considered too extraordinary to be believed ; it was also certain that she had come from her mother's house, and not from Wales, and it was understood that she had come with no one but her maid.

“ It is most awkward,” said Mary, as they walked up the sunny lane, across which the dragon-flies were flitting with humming wings, “ I shan't in the least know what to say to her.”

“ I wish we knew better what has happened, and what she is going to do,” said Lucy.

“ Mamma says she ought never to have come back alone,” said Mary, “ people will talk so.”

“ We *can't* congratulate her,” said Lucy, “ yet it will look so queer to say nothing after she has been married.”

“ It would not do to ask after her husband, I suppose,” said Mary, “ yet it seems odd to ignore him.”

“ We had better wait, and see how things turn out,” said Lucy.

Monkholme looked peaceful enough as they approached it. The house-martins were walking about in the dusty lane with dainty pink feet, and declined to fly away in a hurry; they were flying in and out of the nests under the eaves and in the porch, and the pigeons were cooing on the roof. White-winged butterflies fluttered above the flowers, and two with scarlet colours burned in the sunlight, while the heavy bees floated slowly through the air with a loud murmur.

There was the sound of voices also in the garden, and of low contented laughter. Violet’s voice was clear and sweet, they heard it distinctly like the song of a bird above the noise of a running stream, and the voice that answered her was fuller and lower in tone.

Mary and Lucy glanced at each other in surprise without speaking, for the voices and laughter came nearer, and Violet and Alfred emerged from a narrow shady path leading from the lower garden.

The sunlight was on her face and hair, and

she was turning back to look at him with a 'provoking smile ; she had some flowers in her fingers, and he carried a garden-pot in one hand and a spade in the other. He was looking at her as she turned to him, and listening gravely.

Mary and Lucy paused in embarrassment ; they had not expected such a meeting. They waited without speaking.

"Look, Letty, here are some friends," said Alfred, who saw them first.

Violet turned to them, and went forward at once, offering her hand, while Alfred waited calmly in the background.

"I am so glad to see you," said Violet, in her old happy voice, "it was good of you to come so soon."

"Yes," said Mary, "we heard that you were here ; at least, we understood——" She gazed at Alfred in some perplexity.

Violet saw her look and blushed suddenly, but Alfred was as calm as usual, waiting with a tranquil face till he should be noticed. He never was in a hurry, and he rarely felt embarrassed.

"Yes," said Violet, as if she felt she ought

to introduce him somehow, “here is my husband too; did you not know we came yesterday?”

“Yes—at least, they told us,” Mary answered doubtfully.

“I can’t shake hands with you,” said Alfred, in his clear, calm voice, “my hands are not clean enough. Letty has been making me do an awful lot of gardening. The place has got out of order while she was away.”

“It looks very tidy,” said Lucy.

“But the gardeners may not touch her ferns; she always made me do that business before,” said Alfred, “and she has set me to it again. If you will go on to the house, Letty, I will come after, as soon as I have got rid of all this sand.”

“Yes, let us go,” said Mary, intensely relieved by her host’s calm manner. “And so you both came back yesterday?” she went on to Letty as they entered the house; “are you going to stay?”

“Yes,” said Violet quietly, though with a face slightly flushed; “we came back yesterday, and of course we are going to stay.”

And that was all the explanation she ever

gave to her friends ; the rest they had to guess.

“ She really told us nothing more,” said Mary to her mother afterwards.

“ It was very wise of her to tell you nothing,” said the Vicar, “ and then you can tell no one else.”

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

VIOLET lived at Monkholme all her life afterwards ; she never left it except for brief periods.

The rest of her life was calm and useful, as the beginning of it had been ; sorrow and loss came to her as they come to all, but no great storm disturbed again the even tenor of her existence ; that had been the solitary tempest in a life otherwise tranquil, full of peaceful joys and satisfied affections, a life very safe and complete : she would not have chosen to have it so ; she had desired struggle rather than rest, but she was content to take the rest at last.

The knowledge of that one dreadful episode gave her an awe-stirring sense of the terrible

power of passion and regret ; it seemed to make the atmosphere of her life stiller and quieter, like the great tranquillity of a sunny valley at the foot of cloud-covered mountains.

It was Redfern who had made the separation against which she had struggled so passionately, and it was Redfern whose life was altered by it the most.

He never loved any woman again, and never thought of marrying ; his hopes were ended where hers only began again. Possibly he was greater in his art for the loss in his life ; the passion and strength of his nature had only one outlet left now, and they spoke more strongly in his pictures because they were silent in his life. He would not have been so great an artist if he had been a happier man. All good work must be heavily paid for, chiefly by those who do it ; and it can sometimes be only bought in exchange for themselves.

To begin with, it is chosen perhaps as something added to their lives ; afterwards, little by little, they are content to give their lives for it, till nothing is left to them but the work

alone. Not much besides was left to Redfern.

He was always silent and uncomplaining ; he never talked of, the one impassioned period of his life ; he let it fall out of all outward sight as if it had never been—it only took a deeper place in his heart when he ceased to speak of it.

It cannot be said that he went on loving Violet always ; there was the strong sense of separation shutting down such a feeling ; but he never forgot, never ceased to be conscious how much he would have loved her had she still been his own.

He was very successful, though not till after some years had passed ; he made a great name and what was to him much money, but he always lived the same sort of life in his prosperity as he had done in his adversity ; he did not care to change it. He never tried to make life easy ; after his great disappointment he seemed indifferent to little annoyances, though they annoyed him still ; he accepted all the small vexations of his life at home, and made no effort to escape from them, when he might have done so without

difficulty, just as Violet's father had done in his uncongenial home years before.

He followed his own life silently in his heart, and had not much hope or interest in outward things ; the desire to make those outward things flow on in harmony with his inner life had passed away with Violet's love.

For all that, he had many pleasures left ; a keen sense of delight in beautiful things, a strong interest in helping those who were in difficulty and distress ; an enjoyment in the society and affection of children and animals, of all kinds of helpless things that could not explain their wants and talk about his, and above all, the happiness of working much and well.

He painted landscapes chiefly, wild and solitary scenes, level reaches of land, with tempests coming on afar off ; or valleys bright in sunshine, while the mountains beyond wove a black storm among their peaks ; or a great stillness on a sunny summer sea, with an ominous mist rising in the distance, and a wind breaking up the water a long way off. Generally he liked best the pictures that he

did not finish, or could not easily sell ; he never cared for the successful ones that people talked about ; like all true artists, he felt that the work that he failed to do was very much better than the work he did ; and he preferred those paintings which only indicated his ideas vaguely rather than those which expressed them clearly. When a picture was very much admired he had no more interest in it —he felt convinced that in some way it was wrong and mistaken.

His mother was slightly consoled for the ungraciousness of his early days by the success of his after life. It was provoking that he never would take the same view of it as she did, and would not alter his pictures at her suggestion, though she really knew much better the sort of thing people liked for their money than he did, because he never would listen when they talked. But she venerated his genius in a mysterious way, even when she wanted to have the management of it ; and she had always the satisfaction of talking about him to others, though she might not do it to himself. She felt privately that it was very unjust of him not

to consult his own mother more, when she was so much older, and had such an interest in him. But publicly she triumphed over the mothers whose sons were more affable and could not do such clever things. It was curious to hear her boast everywhere of the very things she grumbled about at home; she scolded him incessantly in private for his silence and ungraciousness, and in society she exalted those faults into interesting proofs of genius.

“He sits and never says a word,” she said to her friends importantly, “and he won’t listen to any advice that *I* can give him.”

It was with much satisfaction that she observed how these really annoying qualities of Redfern’s made other mothers jealous, and caused them to grumble at their more agreeable sons for talking so much.

It was some years before Redfern went again to Monkholme, though he was invited there the following summer, and every summer afterwards.

He had changed from the somewhat gloomy and impatient youth into the silent and meditative man, when he went there

again ; he had travelled a great deal, seen many places, and gone through various experiences. The neighbourhood of Monkholme was little altered, however ; it was a place where changes were slow to come. All the land was in the hands of the old proprietors, who were not fond of alteration and speculation.

He walked from the station to Monkholme, as he had done in the days of his poverty ; the old lane was white with hawthorn as he went up it, following its winding course between green and brown fields. As he approached the house he heard the sound of voices, and guessed that Violet's children were playing in the garden.

A little girl was standing on the bar of the small swing gate, at the side of the drive, looking over it from under a broad garden hat. A taller boy was lashing the stem of a tree with a leathern whip, using much muscular exertion in the performance, and saying, “Gee-up, Neddy,” in vigorous tones.

Redfern paused to speak to them, for he always made friends with children readily.

The boy stopped lashing the tree, and stared at him in a lordly manner, while the little girl put her head on one side and looked at him bashfully, smiling from under her wide hat.

“That is a very lazy horse you are trying to make go, is it not ?” asked Redfern gravely.

“It is not a horse, it is a tree, it can’t go,” said the boy rather contemptuously. He stared at Redfern still, and asked with calmness, “Who are you ? I never saw you before.”

“I am Redfern Hilborough,” he answered with an amused smile ; “are you any wiser now ?”

The little girl still gazed at him over the gate ; she had an idea that he was being rudely treated, and unpolitely detained outside. She wished therefore to share his embarrassment, and announce her name, as he had been required to do. She got down from the gate, and put out her hand to him, saying in a clear little voice of explanation :

“I am Letty.”

He took her hand in his, and walked

towards the house with her as she seemed to expect.

“We will go to mamma,” she observed in her small sweet tones; “Edgar is rude, but you need not mind him. Boys don’t know how to be polite ever.”

And that was how Redfern returned to Monkholme.

After the first visit he went again every year, never staying longer than a few days. He was always as silent and reserved with Alfred and Violet as with the rest of the world, but with the children he was quite at ease and happier than with any one else; they always looked forward to his coming, and welcomed him with delight.

Violet received him kindly. She was perfectly safe and happy in the society of her husband and children; she could afford once more to give him a great deal of sympathy and friendship, but it was given in kind attentions and not in words. He knew very well that no influence from his lonely life could reach to disturb Alfred’s wife and the mother of the happy children who spoilt the trimness of the old garden. He grew at

least to be quite at ease even in her presence.

“I hope,” he said once, with his old odd smile, as they all sat together in the garden, and he had his hand on Edgar’s shoulder, “that no son of yours will ever be such a wicked boy as I was.”

“I hope,” she answered, looking at him with her sweet, earnest eyes, “that no son of mine will ever be so unhappy.”

“That is a new view of the question,” he answered with a short laugh as he got up to walk away; “it is like one of your old fancies. People are not bad, they are only miserable, and must be consoled. No one else thinks so.”

“I don’t believe it makes them any worse to think so,” said Violet.

“Indeed, no, very much better,” he said, and walked away without waiting for an answer.

Alfred, as well as Violet, treated Redfern with more friendliness than he showed to most people, and gave him a very full though not a noisy welcome. Even the little Letty noticed how much more Redfern was considered than any other visitor, though he

was usually so silent, and her parents left him a great deal to himself.

“Papa,” she said once, as she sat on his knee and looked gravely into his handsome face, “is Uncle Ref very poor, or very ill, or very unhappy, or what, that you and mamma always think such a lot about what he likes?”

Alfred looked at her gravely back again. He had grown a more thoughtful man than he had promised in his youth to be, but years always added weight and respectability to the Hilboroughs; like a fine order of trees, they gathered strength when they ceased to increase in height. He answered her seriously.

“No, Letty, but Uncle Ref once had something very good, that he liked very much, and he let it go from him, and it came to me instead. So I should never forget that I owe more to him than to other people.”

“But,” said Letty, with a puzzled face, “could you not have given him half back again?”

“No, my dear. You can’t understand it.

Never throw away what you would like to keep. He threw this away, and could not have it any more, or anything else in its place."

And that was true. The best gifts of life are rarely offered to us twice over.

THE END.

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